

The MYSTERY of the TWILIGHT BELT SEE
INSIDE

Scoops

STORIES of the WONDER-WORLD of TOMORROW



FLAMING FRONTIER AMAZING STORY OF INTER-PLANETARY TRAVEL INSIDE

250 m.p.h. through the Earth by—

The Earth-Chord Express

An Underground Railway to Encircle the Globe

A RAILROAD travelling through the earth's crust is the latest project of Georg Nitzel, a German engineer.

Working on the principle that the shortest distance between two points on a globe is a straight line that goes through the globe (the chord of the arc), the engineer proposes that railways between distant points on the earth should go through the earth instead of over it.

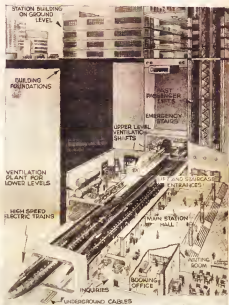
There are no real objections to such a scheme except in the matter of tunnel borings. Before the idea becomes practicable some simpler method of boring will have to be found. Present methods are too costly.

It is not too much to hope, however, that some new method, such as a chemical destructor of the rocks, may be found, and when this arrives experts feel that new minerals and earthly treasures discovered in the boring process may help to pay for the cost of constructing the tunnels.

Strictly streamlined electric trains, with an elliptic cross-section, could travel through the tunnel at speeds of something like 250 m.p.h., and since tunnel ventilation would scarcely be practicable, windows and doors of the train would be hermetically sealed, and it would carry its own oxygen generators and cooling machines to give a continuous supply of fresh air and regulate the temperature.

At the beginning and end of each tunnel, where the earth-bored reaches the surface of the earth, would be situated the gigantic underground stations, a vivid impression of which is given here.

Such a railroad system could be constructed completely to circle the earth, rivers and oceans offering no barrier, and whilst the idea may appear fantastic in the light of present-day experience, it is not without possibility, and forms an amazing vision of the future.



A exterior view of the underground station of the Earth-Chord Express, showing two of the streamlined electric trains passing through. (Below) A cross-section of the earth's surface showing clearly the principle of the amazing train subterranean railway scheme.



Thrills, Mystery and Wonder
Adventure on the Flaming
Frontier of the Wild
Orion Passage

★ THE BLACK STAR PERIL

THERE were twelve of us manning Flaming War Department on the wild Orion passage, and it was an extremely lonely station.

Consider the position. We were looped up, hunched on, on this little metal world, far beyond the outer planets, coasted up on a frontier of space, with the darkness stretching, the deadly sound-cargoes, and the Great Nebula.

Imagine what got us. It wasn't only the lack of direction. It was the fact that beyond the metal doors, steel staircases, the machine rooms with their dials and instruments, and generating machines, there stretched the empty wastes of Orion's belt, the Flaming War as we called it.

It needed a man of iron nerve, self-contained and efficient, to remain in charge of the station, and Captain Berg was such a man.

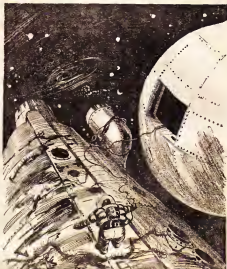
He was a tall young officer, stern and set of face, in his service white uniform, with the flaming brand on his cap, the emblem of the service.

A really efficient physicist and scientist, a little humor.

Yes, the brothers of five years' service on the orbital had "got" him, added that vital strength and persistence that only came to those that was part of the man.

It is probable he needed sympathy, someone to whom to confide. However, it only made him more regard, and probably under difficult circumstances the only about Captain Berg and his kind, must have got out of the war.

But the danger and loneliness of the station, the Great Nebula with its awesome power, and the Black Star with its terrifying threat made all the difference. The re-



The defuncted spacecraft climbed out of the sphere and dropped down on to the rotting and rusted hull of the drifting liner. An unknown force gripped him.

Flaming Frontier

ports of us were greatly aware of the difference that existed between Captain Berg and the U.S.A. Frank Lauer, and we were waiting for it to come to a head.

It did—when the Black Star passed us by.

The two astronomers, Vance and Borges, were with Captain Berg in the bridge room. Their job, of course, was to keep the power constant, but every thousand paths and miles of the Flaming War. The two astronomers were kept constantly busy.

Just now they stood silently behind Captain Berg while he studied the Black Star long and earnestly through the four-inch telescope.

It had not been for the Black Star there would have been no passage through that golden flaming way for the space liners of the year 2024.

The dark corridor of darkness was kept clear of drifting meteors and burning gas by the colored gravitation of the Black Star.

Its pull was tremendous. No vast sea of it in it could have swallowed many such planets as Mother Earth in the case of another is a that glared up at us like baleful eyes, and it had drawn to it a mighty sea of the flaming gas that rode up the Nebula.

And there was the dark corridor through

which stretched during space hours, taking the entire drama and burning gas.

That was what we of the Flaming War station were there for—to guide these infrequent ships on their way, to direct the constantly shifting motor streamers, to inform passing shipping of the safer courses and to go to the aid of any endangered vessel.

It will be seen that Captain Berg's lot was not a happy one.

For a long time he studied the Cyclopean Black Star through the eyepiece of the telescope. That orange star looked like a cold black disc to the naked eye—a black spider nothing in the mighty fiery web of the Nebula. Yet we knew of the density and mass of the cold Black Star. And as wonder we were afraid of it.

The station, hundreds of thousands of miles away, being like a mote between the titan black sun and the changing fiery glory of the Nebula. It was equipped with powerful electrostatic motors to repel the gravitational pull of the Black Star, and to that end we waged a never-ending battle. If the engines should fail, or run short of fuel—

But we dared not think of that contingency.

Lately it was upon the great metal space sphere, and then passed slowly. The

occasional visits of the great space liners on this outer passage changed our lives for the time being.

Not apart from that nothing ever happened. Nothing much, anyhow.

We were expecting the big liner Queen of Space from Kuth, the Centre of Cosmos, within a few days. That would make a diversion on our lonely station. If nothing else did. It would bring a breath of life and gaiety from the outer world.

Captain Berg had been studying the dreaded, far-distant star for a long time through the telescope. We had tapped every lava ridge and mountain on it. Dead one vast, burnt-out black sun. But was it quite dead? There were tales told on the station that made some of us uneasy.

Suddenly Captain Berg jerked away from the telescope, and his face was a white, twisted mask of fear.

"My God!" he breathed softly.

Vance and Borges started forward as they saw the look of horror in their Captain's eyes. "What is it, sir?" questioned Borges quickly.

"Look. See for yourself!" said Captain Berg hoarsely.

First Borges looked through the eyepiece, and he seemed to reel away from it. Vance, after one glance, cried out in horror.

The Menace of the Black Star

"A lie, Captain. There's a mountain right in the dead centre that wasn't there yesterday. My find, it is—"

"A volcano!" said Captain Berg. "The Black Star isn't dead. She's going to erupt—just as I forecast, she'll open a flaming gash that'll make the Great Nebula look like a jet set. I pity any ship that comes through the passage. And ourselves—we stand a chance of being engulfed in fiery lava while that thing goes off—"

He moved to the door.

There, after dabbling at his forehead with a white handkerchief, Captain Berg seemed to pull himself together. Once again he was the cold, self-controlled officer of the great Astral Line, stern and severe in his white uniform, his grey eyes icy, impersonal.

"You will follow me," he said in clipped tones. "This matter has to be dealt with."

★ THE SHOOTER DESERTS

THAT was perhaps the trouble with Captain Berg. He was too stiff, too cold. A shooter he was not. Frankly, the men didn't like him—they didn't even love him. Berg is all very well, but on a station such as ours where every man must pull his weight, the feeling of understanding and sympathy is so precious. They can have all the courtesy they want back at Colonial Hall, the vast and exotic headquarters of the company on Earth.

Here on this mortal world hanging in space as I forget about it all, and get on with the work.

As Captain Berg stepped into the greenroom, men were busy tending wheels and adjusting lenses with their eyes focused upon the multiplicity of gauges around them. Unbidden, an engine cut through unseen valves, while the generators working on the neutralized K-metal hummed incessantly.

Those generators manufactured two hundred thousand kilowatts of electron power, which perpetually bathed the colossal hull of the great space station in a potent glow. It was this power that neutralized the tremendous gravitational pull of the Black Star hundreds of thousands of miles away.

But—and here was another great worry for Captain Berg—our supplies of the K-metal were running short. Fresh supplies were to be brought by the Earthline Queen of Space to the station. If the ship failed to get through the Green passage—

But that was again a contingency that Captain Berg refused to recognize as possible. It meant that when our power supplies were gone, we should drift toward the Black Star, buried in its angry fold of an undrained gas.

Captain Berg's cold eyes sought around for Frank Lawter, the chief engineer.

Lawter had come off his tour and slept, and struggled to the waist and dripping with sweat, he was heading over one of the generators, working hand in hand with his men to repair some minor difficulty that was constantly developing in the intricate machinery.

At sight of that indignity Captain Berg instantly forgot his mission. He yanked thrust a into the backpassage. Unhesitatingly he snatched up all the edge—his dislike for the chief engineer suddenly blotted out.

"Lawter," he snapped. "What the hell are you doing?"

Lawter scrambled to his feet, and touching his finger to his quivering brow, pined desperately into the panel, then five of Captain Berg.

"They said that the white-hot electron-ray was going to burn—be tried only in my mouth. Oh, how nice human is treated ordinary men as machines. It is as if they have had some sort of feeling for Frank Lawter, for though his eyes were icy, knowing this, there were two points of fire blazing in them.

"You have come to do that work for you, haven't you?" It roared.

Lawter nodded. He was a big, square-shouldered man with an easily set on two-colored hair. He looked nothing, not even the flaming Nebula. His grin could be infectious, but it could be a snarl also, and it was something like that now.

It happened Captain Berg, who had no doubt of the courage and worth of the men. You are disgracing the station," he said. "You're a poor example to the men."

Lawter, continuing to grin, swung a spume on his head. Just getting on with the work, sir," he said.

At that moment Captain Berg's mind flew back with something like pain, to the very real mission on which he had come. He wanted Lawter's aid, in fact what he proposed would put the other man in peril of his life.

Frank Lawter, when necessary, acted as gun shooter on flaming Way Station.

It is, of course, generally known that in the year 2024 Detonate was the most powerful explosion. In one of the valves of the station, Lawter kept a huge spheroid. It was in fact an exact replica of the spheroid itself, only there was no governing power. It was charged from the station.

In the great steel bubble, Lawter had been known to step from the Green passage, to break up some surface stresses in the spheroid, or to gas with charges of the deadly Detonate.

How he did it was something of a mystery. How he avoided getting snared in the red-hot gas-dusts of the Black Star, he never worked through the fire and returned safely to the station, Lawter himself alone knew.

And it was in Captain Berg's mind to command this man to drop upon the Black Star and endeavor to break up the volcano before it erupted in a wild geyser that would lay the Green passage to sleep.

How he would do it Captain Berg did not bother to ask. Once fairly caught in the gravitational field of the Black Star, Lawter at his sphere must fall upon it. There could be no escape for him. His electron power could not pull the sphere back out of the deeper zone. He could fall, but in falling upon the Black Star he would in practically gauge his fight that he would crush upon his release. And with the deadly Detonate around the sphere, Captain Berg hoped that as the act of sacrifice Lawter would effectively "shoot" the geyser before it fully erupted.

Captain Berg collected himself to make his extraordinary request.

"I want to see you," he said slowly, stiffly. "Because the Black Star is in position."

"What?"

Lawter's face became deadly serious and grim. Without another word Captain Berg led the way along the narrow aisle of the greater room to where stood a powerful tv screen.

In the screen the disc of the Black Star jumped up, many times magnified, so that they could see its dark face spotted with flaming crimson lava, the whole shining black disc wreathed in the fiery flames of the Nebula.

It was terrifying, terrible beyond words. But it was not the immediate wonder of the Great Nebula that made Frank Lawter catch his breath suddenly.

He saw that out of the lava ridges in the dead centre of Black Star rose a black cone like a hill. It had sprung up overnight, and at present seemed to be erupting dead ashes and gases that were non-inflammable, for the fiery swirling masses of the Nebula gave it a blue quality and streamers of fire shrouded the rest of that gun, lifeless cone.

In a flash Frank Lawter saw the possibilities of it all.

"You think it's going to turn a wild geyser?" he asked sharply.

Captain Berg nodded. "It will close up

the Green passage with fire," he said in a cold tone. "No ship will ever get through to us. Nor will we ever see Mother Earth again. We shall eventually fall into the bosom of the Black Star—when our fuel has given out.

Lawter leered around sharply, and there was a scowl on his ordinarily good handsome face.

"And you must run to try to shoot it with the Detonate?" he asked in measured tones.

Captain Berg nodded, stiffly, with "Yes," he said.

"You'd send me to my death," snarled Lawter. "You haven't got the pluck to go yourself. You'd save your miserable skin, while you talk to me about the wonders."

Lawter checked. Unbelievably he had gone too far.

Captain Berg flinched out at the words, and then went stiffly pale. It was then that Lawter blazed out. The captain checked for shot up explosively as though it had been limited by some unaccountable volcanic action. It checked against Lawter's jaw, and the big man fell back.

Then, fully cognizant of what he had done, Captain Berg bowed quickly on his heel, and strode from the generating room.

A shiver followed. In everyone who had witnessed that scene, there was but one feeling. Fear of the terrible hostility, and the ungodly power of the Great Nebula and the Black Star. And in this emotion of even the two leaders were of ingenuity.

For a moment Frank Lawter rubbed his jaw. His eyes were narrowed down in some state, while his face glowed through his inflamed brow. Then suddenly on a nerve, he strode for the door, making after Captain Berg.

★ THE SPHERE OF DEATH

VANCE and Bergin, the astronomers, were with Captain Berg in the bridge room, with Lawter thrust open the door. Quietly the two men had come in, but their eyes were such, and there was a half-suspense about finding his lips.

"Captain—," he began hesitantly.

But the white-mustached figure was in the box, that under the telescope. Through the outer panel Lawter stared at the Black Star wrapped in the flaming arms of the Nebula.

His head shuddered again for this at what he saw. For from the volcano now there was coming a tremendous geyser of flame, the burning gases. It curved across the dark path of the Green passage like a lance, scattering, and inside in the vast unmeasured white sea of the Nebula seemed to pulse into interplanets.

"Captain," almost pleaded Lawter. "Are, now, listen. I can shoot that volcano. It's not too late—"

Captain Berg rose up from the low velvet chair. Never had he been so motionless and dignified, so fully alive as now.

"Look for yourself," he commanded curtly, contemptuously.

Lawter sank into the chair. Through the telescope he saw a shivering slight shape standing between the white curtains of the Green Nebula. It was undoubtedly a ship, and it was waiting and waiting as if seeking a way to get past the mass of flame.

"That is the Queen of Space, the largest ship ever launched," said Captain Berg in his cold, unemotional tone. "She carries five thousand souls aboard her, as well as precious minerals, and the K-metal and stores for six months. She cannot turn back, for, as you know, the tide of the Nebula has closed the Green passage behind her for fourteen days. She is trapped between walls of flame."

Lawter jumped to his full height, his face aflame and eager.

"I'll go, Captain."

But Captain Berg held up his hand. "It is useless," he said coldly. "Besides—," with waiting contempt—"I would not care

Hurting Towards a Sun of Doom

and ran on my station to take on a task that I could not undertake myself. No, the only sensible hope of blasting out that pyrexia flame is with the Underver Air."

Lawter stared aghast as the Captain moved to the speaking tube, took out the plug and issued his orders down it to the generating room.

"Close off the entire power output of the station for exactly one hour. Join the full capacity of our generators to the Underver Air and apply full pressure."

"But, Captain," shouted Lawter hoarsely, "if you cut off the power the station will drift full into the gravitation field of the Black Star. We'll all be trapped!"

Captain Berg stared with cold hostility and then ignored Lawter. He walked to the table and reached for an alligraph. Then he studied the gravimeter. The needle, which had been at Zero, was slowly beginning to move upward; in fact, the two men in the bridge room could already feel the tiny acceleration of the great metal station.

The power had been cut off. That meant that the battle with the dead world had been given up for the time being, and the sinister Black Star was pulling them, pelting...

Captain Berg's plan was clear to Lawter. The station was equipped with the Underver Atom which carried a shooting shaft of electricity from the generators. A striking light in that terrific beam, from a space hazy to a vortex stream, would automatically be destroyed—crushed into atoms.

And Captain Berg's idea was to drift in

close enough to the flaming gases on Black Star, and turn that searing shaft of electricity upon it—to try to shoot the gases that way, get it out as a puff of wind just as it was a flaming rattle.

It was a scheme laden with peril for those on the station. For the truth was that there was only sufficient K metal aboard the station to last a day or two longer. And all that supply would be taken by the generators and utilized in the terrific beam that the Underver Air must put out to combat the gases.

What, then—afterwards? Suppose that bitter wind of flame from Black Star were extinguished, the station would be powerless. It must inevitably fall upon the Black Star, wreathed in its fiery streamers from the Nebula, unless—

There only hope was that the Queen of Space, with the poisonous K metal aboard, would reach them in time as they hurtled towards the distant sun. With renewed power, of course, they could get the generators going again, and fight back, but by then against the pull of the dead flame would be vain.

But what a sick Captain Berg was talking! Justifiable and highly courageous, of course, but it was a desperate gamble with the lives of all those aboard the station.

Lawter took an imperative step forward, his voice hoarse and imploring.

"Listen, Captain. There's something about that sphere of mine you don't know. You think I shot at it, and then watch on

the electron, power and shoot off. You think I'm just a death driver and a shooter. But it's not that. I'm an inventor; I've studied just as you have, and that sphere of mine is equipped with a screen that sets out off gravity, on? Its screen is a field of energy in just a matter of radiations. My screen absorbs and dissipates the radiation of gravitation."

Captain Berg looked up, his thin lips smiling in twinkling amusement.

"You are a fool," he said severely. "You are talking wild nonsense which you yourself don't believe. Gravity is not a radiation; it is a bond, a unit atom in the ether. That is elementary. The tendency of the curve is to straighten, and so the pull of one body on another is increased."

"I tell you," shouted Lawter wildly, "I can fall step the Black Star and step posed where I will in the sphere. I can shoot the Nebula, and, why—because, can, why put the station in danger? I'm going out in the sphere, anyhow!"

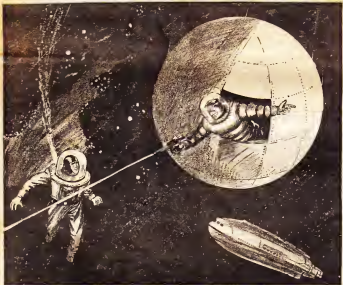
Captain Berg jumped to his feet, suddenly dynamic with energy.

"If you go, that sphere will not be charged from our generators," he declared angrily.

"We need all our power! It's a suicidal act."

"I'm going, anyhow."

Lawter strode to the door and Captain Berg followed him. His object ostensibly was to see that the sphere was not charged with electronic power through its system of cables, the point that he believed Lawter



Behind the mica glass of his helmet Frank Lawter's face twisted into a wolfish snarl and he deliberately pressed the trigger of the ray pistol. A cone of greenish light streamed out at the man coming up in the rocket seat.

The Hold-up in Space

tried to catchlight the sphere through space. But he knew he believed that Lester had lost his mental balance.

For the big man strode straight to the valves. There were two of them, remote on both, each sufficed to house a space ship three hundred feet in length.

Lester laid open the doors at one of the great study labs, and there was his enemy, a great ball gripped in a handless fist in darkness, covered with mirrored metallic plates like the hull of an ocean-going vessel.

Without a further word to Captain Berg, Lester scrambled up on a rear ladder turned to its side, left its reach and, three-quarters the height of the sphere. Then he reached out an arm, and the two doors opened outward under his touch.

Frank Lester climbed inside the sphere. Perhaps half a minute later he thrust out his head, and now he was staring at space and not behind.

"Better get out of the valve, Captain," he advised. "I'm going to open the outer doors."

He could do that from inside the sphere, for the valves were mounted on a vertical way, and the release of a lever and only one of it riding down the runway, but opened the outer doors of the valve.

Captain Berg, with a clang, stepped back, and the outer doors closed on the sphere.

Half a minute later the outer doors opened, and the sphere rolled. Captain Berg, in the middle now, stared down through the vitreous and saw the vessel sphere dropping like a plummet, down down towards the fiery support that spanned across the sky. The Great Nebula, and the Black Star like an unending eye in its midst.

"There goes a fool," said Captain Berg under his breath. "He's mad, I think. I wonder I didn't drive him to go out that way."

Nevertheless he was uneasy about Frank Lester. The sphere began was falling.

* A SET-BACK FOR THE CAPTAIN

CAPTAIN BERG had sufficient to occupy his mind, however, in the loss that followed. This drift or detour was alarming. His gauges told him that the huge, powerful machine was moving at two thousand miles an hour—falling at that rate upon the great dead world in the midst of the flaming Great Nebula.

And from Black Star the terrible glare of flame was growing steadily. Captain Berg had little time to look for the Queen of Space, the liner that had been during latter and thither, seeking a way through. Nor had anyone seen a sign of the gray sphere in which Frank Lester had presumably dropped to his death. We were all too busy at the Challenge.

It was a terrifying weapon, that cosmic gun. It was a ray machine on a revolving platform, with half a dozen propellers, like haws, moving out through the vitreous panel. Behind were coils, grounded to the generators, glowing red.

It had taken a full hour to fit up. And now it was aligned on the great planet from the Black Star.

Practically in the nick of the hour he had allotted, Captain Berg stepped into the governing console, stiff and erect in his white uniform as if a poker had been placed down his back. He asked a few questions, then quietly stepped up on the platform and pulled two or three levers.

Immediately we could see down a long in cardboard column from the cathode grids of the spectroscopy-chamber, down the column descended into the very bowels of that black disc from which burst the mighty flame.

We who watched knew the tremendous power that was poured out from our generators, and there was fear in our hearts.

And then something happened.

The great column of fire from the Black

Star stopped like a splash. And rebounded, clouds of dust and smoke rose to the very angry light of the Nebula. The terrific, instantaneous blast of the cosmic gun had blown out the great flame just as a man's breath might blow out a candle.

But the dense clouds of cinders and smoke had been erupting evidently for many weeks, and formed a complete barrier.

And we about the Flaming Way station, which was now rushing to doom without power, were veiled as if in a mighty fog.

Thirteen passages, usually very clear in the terrible awesome light of the nebula, had become suddenly smothered in ash and smoke.

We could see nothing—no sign of the face, clouds of space, which we had hoped would come to us and after we had blown out the power.

There was a dreadful feeling of suspense as we fell rapidly upon the Black Star. Of course we were many thousands of miles

THE UNSINKABLE MOTOR-BOAT

ONE of the strongest motor-boats ever designed recently went through successful tests.

The hull is a circular-deck present appearance and another unique feature in that it is the provision of buoyancy tanks in the bottom of the boat.



There has been only a slight attempt to provide a bow and stern and from all angles the new boat looks a very ugly duckling.

Yet provided with an ordinary outboard motor it has carried up to fourteen passengers in the tub like hull, which is provided with numerous glass curtains to protect the occupants from the spray.

The boat would stand against a heavy sea, for the hull is made of steel.

Very. Captain Berg in the short run with Vane and Rogers attended upon him, made measurements and lightning calculations with the telegraph, and in the end spoke two words only.

"Set forward," he said. "We have less fuel of life. Or rather, less than that, for before we could land on that cold, dead world the whole station would flash to meaningless flame in the Nebula. There was no time; it would be a swift, suicidal death."

But none of us wanted to die.

The tremendous field of cinders and smoke into which we had plunged arose here ascending from the volcano long before it was blown out. In vain Captain Berg looked for the Queen of Space, and tried to get her in the megaphones. The space liner was evidently not turned on, either to receive or to answer. It appeared something had happened to her.

And then suddenly Captain Berg pulled up the signals of distress.

"Rogue motor vessel!" it came through the speaking horns. And anyone who has heard the stern blast of a space liner has heard the most dreaded sound of the modern age.

The Queen of Space was in distress. She had either been trapped amongst the rocks and fiery parts of the Nebula, or she had lost her bearings in the fog of cinders and smoke, and was appearing in Flaming Way station for aid.

Captain Berg, his face strained and white, was in the short run, endeavoring to move to get the hot space liner on the radio phone, when Vane rushed in.

"Captain, she's sighted!" he cried anxiously. "See her!"

He pointed through the vitreous panels, and Captain Berg, with the shiny ball of the great space way leading and twisting amidst the white centers of the Great Nebula, like a lost thing.

Being an expert himself in the distress years of the Flaming Way, the Captain immediately dashed upon a loud and playful shout.

"I'm going out to bring the ship into the station," he announced.

He put on one of the Bureau-rocket suits. Miraculous as they are, these space suits, with rocket equipment attached, are just about as much use as a lobster is to a swimmer in stormy seas—and he never.

For one thing the rocket suit cannot last for long, and once the rocket fuel is exhausted the space man is adrift, without motive power. There are other drawbacks.

These rocket suits are needed only as a last emergency in the navigation of space.

Naturally, we, too, noticed Captain Berg about out from the valley with several feelings of hope and fear. Would he reach the Queen of Space in time to get the ship, with its thousands of souls and the provision of the Black Star, back to the station? Would he be in time to save us?

One thing was certain. If Frank Lester could have seen the Captain of Flaming Way Platform then he would never have said that Captain Berg lacked courage.

Captain Berg, however, never reached the hot space liner. Nothing out there, space, with the bit of space streaming out behind him from his rocket equipment, he suddenly came face to face with his enemy.

The sight stunned and attended him. There in his path was the great sailing gray sphere, its doors open and, peering out, grim and ghastly in his sight and his consciousness. Indeed, said Frank Lester.

He has glared but he gripped a rapid ray pistol.

His repulsive gesture and "Go back!" defined the same glare of his helmet, his face now twisted in a wolfish snarl. Suddenly, recklessly, he pressed the trigger of the ray pistol, and a cone of greenish light streamed out.

But the ray missed Captain Berg by many yards. It was intended only as a warning to him. With a furious baffled gesture, the Captain of the space station bowed. How he hated Frank Lester in that moment! The man was mad—mad. He had consigned them all to a terrible death.

But it was no use continuing against that ray pistol. Captain Berg turned and stood back to the drifting starward.

* SPACE LINER GOES THROUGH

And Frank Lester, with a dry, daggered expression on his face, remained motionless. Strange as he knew what Captain Berg must be thinking of him—what the crew of the station would think of him.

"Can't be helped," he muttered despondently. "Can't let him loose that ship."

The sphere rolled away through the scorching darkness of the flame passage. Inside, in a small space between a pair of instruments, Lester worked feverishly. Transmitters burned, and a set of vacuum tubes filled with pallid crimson fire. He closed a switch, and the glowing wall of the sphere suddenly became transparent, and he was about the great glowing ball of a space liner.

Get to go on and blow it up, Lester muttered feverishly.

Five minutes later he was dividing on to the ball of the drifting space ship with the sphere hanging close alongside. The ball was

and, crowded, and steamed with a stodge of old wood. Facing open one of the sterns, Frank Lester entered.

It was almost silent in the graveyard. The man in the space suit gripped his way through the old valves. An open door, and beyond that darkness—swirling darkness. Frank Lester watched on his thigh.

His face twisted in a disordered grimace behind the steel glass of his helmet. "God!" he thought. "A doubt, all right. And as I thought, they caught it in the Vermont forest."

The beam of his torch had lit upon a sandy night. Northern, shobbers of rain coming in clouds round a table, just as they had died. And over their white leaves were swarming black, heavily thorned things that made Frank Lester retreat bodily.

He knew this better that infected this forest ship. It was no more the Queen of Space than his own sphere was. It was a space ship from Venus. And these awful conditions! They were a horrid, disgusting secret that isolated the dream, obscuring vegetation about the mysterious events of the forests of Venus.

Frank Lester could conceive the horror that must have taken place aboard this plague ship. The funeral customs had dropped from the starbanging vigilance, and they had got into the stars, doubtless, but they must have multiplied. The torch lit hundreds of the black spiders, crawling over the floor towards him.

Frank Lester had come aboard to blow up the ship, but now suddenly he retreated, fighting down a wave of panic. If he stayed to place the charge of dynamite, he over his wild joy failed. It might be that he would stay as near to explode the charge. The terrible mutability of the system would live through and tell him in an instant, perhaps through he was in space out.

With a hush of cry, Frank Lester turned and hastily retreated.

"I am not in a mood," he determined that he should sit or grope down the ship's side. "The Queen—the Queen—the Queen."

The words broke in several agonies from Captain Berg's lips as he stole into the passenger room of Flamingo Way Station. He had returned, and was still in space out and silent. He was not by any means his usual self collected self.

And now Berg's astrophysicists were then over the circular table over the floor of the operating room, watching with one the glowing peaks of a great silver ball some of this dream.

It was the Queen of Space, the ship was a hatching in a strange and eerie manner. No movement from her sterns, no movement around her sides. The ship was a black, round, but apparently it was being driven in the great space station by force of gravity.

"He had to stay on landing here," muttered Captain Berg. "Lester did, the same. But he won't succeed in his object of making us all to our death. No, the ship's making her in. We're saved."

He turned, and stepped out again in two of us in go and open the valve, so that the approaching ship might come up to us. But just then a cry broke from the two men bent over the screen.

"Look! The Sphere!"
Staring down through the screen behind, Captain Berg saw Lester's strange sphere. And a noise ripped from his lips suddenly. It was a gasp, yes, but this, distinctly was the sphere down open. And from the earth seemed a sound, a sound ball.

A projectile!
"It's a change of the Detroit!" rapped out Captain Berg. "Lester's! The good word for us in space. We're going to blow us out of existence!"

But the impending projectile was not such a, for us. Staring open mouthed, with hearts thumping against our ribs, we watched it fly.

Safety Line for Airships

CAN IT BE DONE?



Buoy Lines

THE DOWN-WEIGHT OF THE BUOY AND THE WEIGHT OF THE AIR FORCED AN AMERICAN AIRSHIP IN THE ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, TO RISE AND WAS REMOVED INSTANTLY FROM THE SHIP. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAVED.

SUCH A DEVICE IS SUGGESTED ABOVE. REEL WITH THE SHIP ARE 40 BUOY LINES EACH OF WHICH ARE ATTACHED 500 POUND WEIGHTS THAT WILL

float on water in an emergency at sea these weights totaling 200,000 pounds are pulled released, dropping to the bottom and floating on the water.

The ship, free of the great weight, naturally rises to the length of the attached buoy lines and either after the storm or sailing out of it, the ship rises in the buoy lines and weighs and moves on to its destination.

Steadily a hoarse cry broke from Captain Berg.

"We're flying in the Queen of Space!"

The rounded shell of Detroit in the plunging ball of the approaching space ship, and suddenly we were blinded by a terrible white light. When we could see again, there was no sign of the space ship plunging through the darkness. It had been there in space.

But many of us had seen that motionless ball had even been the ship in the sphere before. And this was now making straight for us.

Vener and Bergen accounted to their feet with startled cries.

"Don't let us let go! It's coming!"

Our hearts must have stood still while we waited. Suddenly only passed them—

"CRASH!"

Cries rang in the operating room. Stunned calls rushed from mouth to mouth. We were all staring at the test screen. The thick plate glass had been smashed, and there, staring as much as it had been automatically sealed in the center was the glowing rounded ball of the sphere hovering and brood.

It glowed—glowed with a pale shimmering light. We could not make it out. We stared. Then suddenly Captain Berg stood for the doorway, examining it with a startled in credulous look on his face. He saw that the sphere that a moment before had been driven to the end of its side by the terrible ball of the Black Ship, had swung back to zero.

Our breathing light, after the great deal would have been crushed—stopped.

The truth dawned on us. But for the last three years we were working out just the thing which we should have done long ago. Two of the crew worked down the metal gutters and the thousands of wires that were always handy and set to work to seal the sphere round the globe that had moved in.

"We said we had prepared an invention for sealing off the entrance of gravity," mused Captain Berg in an odd voice. "I wonder—"

It was not until hours later that we learned the full truth. Landing through the sphere seals we saw the lighted shape at a great space from standing grounds at through the void.

It pointed in the Queen of Space.

And Frank Lester was aboard.

The speed limit was sphere falling upon the dead world, and had used to save him. The sphere and those aboard knew of the death ship from Venus in their path, and that, in part, had delayed their progress.

They had also witnessed Frank Lester's outrageous act. As a last desperate resort he had placed his gravity screen in one of the rounded shells that usually held the Detroit and shot it towards Flamingo Way space station.

That shot had saved us, and the invention made Frank Lester famous.

But the mystery the crew thought about in of the great drama that followed showed the Queen of Space, when Frank Lester and Captain Berg were under a sudden attack and duck heads to see a new and sinister dreadfulness.

The Black Vultures

* ON THE TRACK

I was through the freezing mist of an Arctic dusk that the tanker moved far away into the bay at Zoroaster's house and let her crew work a rattle and rattle plunge into the city sea.

Druck was taken ashore in one of the ship's boats, his hands handcuffed behind his back, and Zoroaster in person was standing on the black wooden jetty waiting to welcome him.

"So we meet again, Mr. Oldham," said the leader of the Black Vultures, and the smile on his lips was belied by the streamers of his oblique great eyes.

"Yes, unfortunately," replied Druck gently.

"Unfortunately in respect to *you* as you are concerned," replied Zoroaster. "But come, we cannot talk here. Bring him along!"

In the midst of his most of others Druck was marched to Zoroaster's quarters where four or five of the latter's officers were lounging.

"Lash him to a chair!" ordered Zoroaster, and without resistance, because he knew resistance would avail him nothing, Druck was lashed.

"Now, Mr. Oldham," said Zoroaster, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell us what has happened to Alpha and Beta!"

"I don't know," replied Druck reluctantly.

"So I assumed," purred Zoroaster. "Not only have you lost me two of my pilots, but you have also lost me two valuable machines. I wonder what you think I intend doing to you for that, Mr. Oldham?"

"You're going to kill me, I suppose!" said Druck steadily.

"Yes, I am going to kill you," nodded Zoroaster, "but probably not quite in the way you think. Death is going to come to you exceedingly slowly and exceedingly painfully."

Druck was silent, and picking up a length of thin rope he Zoroaster thrust it into the glowing hole of the stove.

A red-hot iron protruded against the eyeballs. It was as hot as the whole of your greenhouse! went on the pirate leader. "as will I tell you. Druck will come in a more subtle form than that. But tell me, Mr. Oldham, what was the message you sent out on the tanker's wireless?"

"You can find out," snapped Druck.

"Yes, I will find out," said Zoroaster. "The red-hot iron has burned the most valuable of tongues, Mr. Oldham, so you are about to discover."

He withdrew the iron bar from the stove and Druck stared in fascinated horror at the glowing end. He had expected Zoroaster to kill him, he would have been a fool to have hoped otherwise, but he had not realized that he himself the thought of tortures.

Holding the red hot end of the iron bar he looked as though to test the skin, Zoroaster nodded and advanced upon his helpless prisoner.

"I think we will remove the right eye first," he said pleasantly. "I am holding out in hope of mercy, Mr. Oldham, but I tell you again, what was the message you sent out on the tanker's wireless?"

"I've told you I refuse to say," returned Druck, nothing in his voice intended to keep his voice steady.

"Ah, well, we'll see," murmured Zoroaster.

Slowly and deliberately he advanced the red-hot iron towards Druck's eye. His officers looked on in silence, but their faces reflected the horrible fascination they found

in the sight of a man being deliberately blinded.

As for Druck, he closed his eyes and described his hands. The agony would be terrible, he knew, and he was feeling sick to his very soul.

Already the heat of the iron was searing his face as with a terrible deliberateness. Zoroaster pushed it slowly forward. To him came the pure of Zoroaster's voice:

"Just a touch at first, Mr. Oldham. Just sufficient to start and scald the eye ball!"

"You devil!" burst out Druck hoarsely. "Ah, an agony in anticipation you feel the agony of it," sniggered Zoroaster. "But let me assure you it will be nothing to the agony of realization."

The iron was within half an inch of Druck's eye and as though to prolong the exquisite torture the iron was going back, Zoroaster kept sniggering at his prisoner again.

"Come, open your eyes, Mr. Oldham!" "But you don't see the iron?" "Ah, well, it will be an easy matter to pass through the eye ball!"

Druck groaned aloud and in that case

Black Vultures, preying on the Corpses of Dead Cities

By GEORGE E. ROCHESTER

Instantly Zoroaster wheeled, his face ashen, and the wireless operator dashed in.

"It's about!" he shouted. "The loss has been fatal!"

* BRITAIN ATTACKS

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Druck and with a snarl of his machine and left them alone to fight for his life as he shut down.

"If he goes out as one of our warriors he can spin out his life and make a noble landing," that way," returned Zoroaster harshly.

"No, I don't agree," said Jalne. "Any fight which comes will be a fight to the death. A spinning machine will be shot down certainly. It is an old trick. Keep him alive, I say, and he will be one added to our number, for if he refuses to fight they'll get him."

"Yes, I agree with Jalne," nodded Schiff. "He is more useful to us alive than he would be dead. You can always torture him when the danger has passed. Keep him alive, Zoroaster, and let him fight for his life with us, if it comes to a fight!"

Zoroaster was silent a moment, then he turned the counter-iron was adapted by his pilots and by the savage desire to capture and kill the man who had betrayed the secret of the base.

But not for nothing was Zoroaster leader of the Black Vultures. Vengeance could wait. If the base was not discovered by dawn they would be situated by the fighting sounds on the ship and Druck Oldham would either have to fight for his life or consent to being killed by the British vessels, for the latter would be quite unable to differentiate between him and the pilots of the pirate squadron.

So, dropping the iron to the floor, Zoroaster snapped:

"All right, we'll make the hand fight for us. But leave the ship and send the ship!"

Somebody creating his good fortune, Jalne was not far from the beach, and still undisturbed, was marched to the great shed which served the wireless station, and from there into a cabin, the door of which was locked on him.

Through the camp was sounding the resources along the shore, and from each ship, shore and quarters men were passing on to the parade ground.

We've got to evacuate this base at once!" Zoroaster told them. "I am taking off every man. The majority will not abandon the tanker. Get your lot, for we take the air in half an hour, and the tanker will not start until after 10."

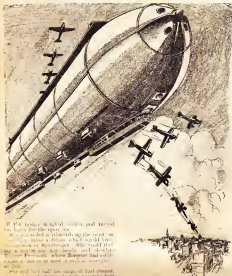
Really the men went to work, some running to their quarters to collect their kit, others dashing to the great wireless shed to complete the message and bring the great transmitter out to take the air on what might well turn out to be his last words through space.

"Time makes pass, but when the first check of the men had passed, Zoroaster and his men began to feel that after all, there was a little cause for alarm provided they could evacuate the base within the hour.

For the tanker would be lost in the midst of the hottest zone down, and as for the army, she would be driving swiftly through space a noisy hundreds of miles away.

The men were still divided, and the thought of their great gun back of the great old ship, plunging its way steadily northwards, made them shudder. It was once with such shudder that within thirty minutes of the alarm being sounded every man who was leaving abandoned the ship and crowded the gangway, the waiting rows were cut off, and as the men of the engine crew in a shell, painting white, the major ship moved up into the night and among clouds, on over the desolate waters of the Arctic Ocean.

Once she had gone, the leading party and ground staff made a dash for it. The tanker's lights, and when the last man had been taken



If the tanker weighed anchor and turned its bows for the open sea, it was doomed in the twinkling of an eye. To make a detour which would have taken it to the open sea was out of the question. The only way to save the ship was to fight it out on the spot. The Arizona was not built for such a task.

She still had half her cargo of fuel aboard, the average ship having had time to take half its oil over tanks, the oil and fuel being in a tough long pipes of armored rubber covered by powerful pumps.

There found Miller, the chief officer, on the bridge with Kermans, the second officer. Both had been promoted by Kermans, Miller by the rank of captain and Kermans to that of major.

They were not talking as they stood there by the command bridge rail but were listening with straining ears. Suddenly Miller's glazed hands gripped the rail and he looked at Kermans, for through the dimly illumined bridge only for the twinkling of the night, he saw the distant manifestation of rapid, long bows.

"They're there," cried Miller.

"Yes, across there," replied Kermans.

"I only hope they don't see this ship!"

Miller glanced around him through the rail.

"They'll have to be flying very low to get in on this visibility," he said. "In fact, not at all the ship they'll be after."

He looked off the bow dressing from before.

"Listen!" he yelled.

Kermans listened, and plainly as his ears caught the rapidly approaching drone of an engine.

"Now that, they're coming!" he gasped.

* THE DOOMED TANKER

Swiftly the game of the approaching aircraft dropped in volume. The tanker's bows were crowded with the men before off down the main, and suddenly they seemed to be reaching back of the Arizona's bow.

Something approaching a ship went up from the nose of the Arizona's bow.

And away in starboard—and instantly Miller suppressed it.

"Stay tight!" he shouted then realized the footbridge of the order, for the pilots of the hostile aircraft could hear nothing above the din of their own engines.

A few moments later he had more for perceptive stern again, for the nose of the Arizona was returning, and an aircraft was seen to Miller that they were heading straight towards him.

That officer before would wireless them, or of presence in those waters when he gave away the location of the base," he said to Kermans. "They're looking for us!"

Without waiting the roar of the Arizona engines deepened to a deafening thrum and a fast lighting went with the red white and blue markings of Arizona thundered low over the night bow.

"We're sighted!" growled Miller.

Kermans made no reply. He was watching the scout which had wheeled and was coming low over the tanker again. There the thunder of the engine died away and with a popping, taking over the scout dropped down on to the water and came surging in land.

"Stop your engines and leave!" shouted the pilot. "I'm coming aboard!"

"What shall we do?" muttered Kermans, drawing a heavy automatic from his pocket.

"Fire him a bullet between the eyes!" yelled Miller.

"Alone, he heard!"

"He's returned that he's sighted us. Here's another ball down at the stern!"

He repeated an order, the engine taking up the charge, and as the tanker slowly

lost way its nose lighting came open, dipping down out of the water to lead on the water and more surging slowly upwards with engine taking over, about one remaining—scattered scattered.

Kermans edged across to Miller.

"Those machines are single engines," he said. "There's only one pilot left. We can get the lot of them."

"What about the fellow overhead?" demanded Miller.

"Wait can he do?" demanded Kermans.

He said and got another, that's all. And it's thickening over the water. We can get to the top of the fog."

Miller stood towards the work of evening was the boat into a solid yellow fog.

"I believe you're right," he muttered.

Anyway, it's a chance. Get down on deck and let the men. Every one of them is armed!"

Obediently Kermans (climbed down the ladder Miller and Miller watched him passing swiftly through the pass of men waiting to them as he worked his way forward.

The pilot of the scout which had first landed was coming up the rope ladder which had been thrown over the side for him. The pilot, who had brought their scout close to the water, was sitting at their controls waiting the boat.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Kermans roughly, confronting the pilot who had landed aboard a young, Swedish youngster of no more than twenty.

"We want to know what ship you are and what you are doing in those waters," said the pilot.

"Oh, is that so?" asked Kermans, instead on the butt of his gun at the pocket of his leather jacket.

"Yes, it is so," replied the youngster sharply. "Let me see your log and maps, please."

"Just take a look at that instead," roared Kermans, getting his gun from his pocket. "It's the last thing you'll ever see!"

With the words the black-black head quivered forward, and as the heavy crash of the automatic the last startled backward shot down between the eyes, his body falling forward to go plunging down into the water below.

As though that shot had been a signal the men whipped their guns from pockets and from behind their backs, and a machine-gun fire was opened on the pilot's ship, the water rose around.

The target was too close to allow of a miss, and the light was reddened before he could wrap up his thrills as pull his own gun, so suddenly and swiftly had come the broadside of revolver fire.

Bodily wounded, one pilot did get his machine gun, but his fire caused to function on the water and the machine crashed into the side of the tanker, splintering its propeller and starboard wing.

The sinking of the scout which had been so easy matter, and he took place in the boat riddled by more than twenty bullets, which now through him from the rail alone.

"That's three more," roared Kermans, waving up the bridge ladder. "Let's get ready, way. We've only got quarters of a mile to go before we make the fog."

Miller had already leapt to the engine room through, but as his hand closed on the handle he suddenly stopped, staring in horror at a small black cylindrical object which was dropping down towards the starboard deck from the scout wheeled overhead.

Next instant, with a scorching roar, the black bomb fell on the star deck, blowing men to pieces and wounding in several, devastating way through steel plates into the great fuel tanks.

A sheet of flame, hard and terrifying, leapt upwards, then as another bomb burst (Read on in columns next of next page)

Continuing . . .

The Black Vultures

tell on the doomed ladies, the vessel became a moving holocaust of flame from stem to stern.

Men screamed and perished in their death agony, many flung themselves overboard, bringing bodies which were extinguished and destroyed in the icy waters of the Arctic sea.

That they died, those who had fled from the boat aboard the tanker and only when the red hot and incandescent ball had plunged beneath the swirling water, carrying its charred and blackened corpses to different, did the pilot of the sole remaining machine in this air bring the nose of his boat seaward towards the base and the starboard corner. *Engle!*

MEANWHILE, at a height of thirty-five thousand feet, the ship was diving southwards through space above a heavy belt of cloud three thousand feet in depth.

In the central cabin Zoroaster was peering forward backward and forward, his hands clenching and weakening behind his back.

"Yes, London!" he burst out. "We have the bodies! Let them come! We'll show them whether or not they can board me from my base now."

"I tell you we have not the fuel to take us there and back to our base on the Tanager Peninsula," said S. Hall for the second time. "Let us sit in the fire for the few minutes we, called from this dump there, then destroy London, if that is your intention."

"Yes, it is my intention!" cried Zoroaster. "And you are wrong about the fuel. I have been working out the ratings and compared it with my supply. We have a surplus of five hundred gallons."

"We have a lot, I tell you," objected S. Hall. "We are carrying extra weight, and five hundred gallons will be useless if we run into adverse winds."

"We run into adverse any wind we wish," said Zoroaster indignantly. "I tell you, we have London as my credit for fuel on our own account."

"What I can't understand," observed Faber, "is why you didn't wipe out the aircraft carrier. It would have been a small thing against Britain. I grant you small, but it is compared with what we are about to do, but it would have taught them that they cannot come against us with impunity."

"How the devil could I have wiped her out without serious risk to myself?" started Zoroaster. "In the first place, my jaw has been broken. To register an attack like we would have been forced to descend into the range of her anti-aircraft guns, which are among the most deadly of my batteries. A few shells, through in sight have crippled us completely."

"Yes, but we could have swooped down to the attack on our fighting assets," said Faber. "One thundering dive out of this line, landing strip, and a score up into space again. They'll never have got us."

"Wouldn't they?" asked Zoroaster. "Do you think you had, that the captain of the Angle would be prepared for some such move as you are going?" His fighting units would be out, and he'd have been spotted before we got within three thousand feet of her. I grant you we might have registered direct hits on her, but at what cost? At what cost, I say."

"Overcome London?" answered Faber.

"No; to attack the Engle would have been to have taken a risk out of all proportion to the gain," said Zoroaster. "But London we can both under cover of darkness and close ship escape. By dawn to-morrow that gently will be one less link of the dead line."

"Overcome London?" The Black Vultures are ready to wait again. Don't miss the thrilling conclusion of this startling story in SCOOPS next week.

The Mystery of the TWILIGHT

Murder in the mining city on the Twilight Belt of Mercury. An innocent man faces the capital charge—until two killers make a slip

By J. N. T. LINTOTT, B.Sc.

* THE MURDER IN THE MINE

THE crash of a ray revolver and the sound of a cry that was cut off short brought Tom Hewat jolting from the control room of the big engine plant that constituted a breathable air under the forest edge dome which completely covered the only building on the surface of Mercury.

It was a mining station situated on the twilight belt of the planet, on the border-line between that zone of Mercury which presented always to the man, looking in a perfectly clear furnace heat of 300° F., and the other zone which presented always to similar space, from the extreme cold of minus 212° F.

Hewat stopped short as he entered the central shaft chamber. Lying in front of the latter work gates that closed the lift shaft was a man with a ray revolver not a foot away from his hip, and his head. It was an iron weapon, and he was shot in the back. His clothes still smoked.

Hewat ran at once that he was dead. He was Frank Ambrose, chief surveyor, returned but a few days from one of his perilous parties along the twilight belt between a fiery desert on one side and a frost-bitten world on the other.

The shaft chamber was devoid of furniture or rubbish. It was a bare chamber with walls, floor, and ceiling of steel, its purpose being merely to form the top of the ten mile deep shaft which sank down to the rich strata of rare metals just below the Mercurian crust. Two lifts served this shaft, and Hewat stepped from the side stairs that ran up at the bottom of the shaft and the other near the top and ascending.

He automatically picked up the ray revolver and turned it over in his hand. He was thus engaged when he only drew looking into the shaft chamber, over the one from the oxygen plant, which opened, and men came tumbling in.

Several moments the ascending lift came into view. It stopped, and the latter work gates automatically slid open.

From the lift came two men. One was tall and hawk-faced, with cold, pale blue eyes and a somewhat morose. He was Mexico Mandrake, manager of the mining station. The other man was less round in countenance, a short, thin individual with furtive eyes and a perpetual nervous smile as his thin lips curled slightly back.

"What's this, Hewat?" growled Mandrake, coming to a halt beside the body of Ambrose. "Fayed in the back, eh? This man has been murdered."

A voice whence followed his words. Hewat became aware that the colonists were staring at him silently. He pulled at a sudden thought.

"I found him like this, eh?" he said quickly. "Not two minutes ago I was working in the oxygen plant control room. I heard a shout and a crash. I rushed to see. Ambrose was lying just as he is now. The murderer had gone—through that door. I suppose."

He pointed to the door through which

persons were still coming. Instantly a sharp shout came from some of those already round the body. Mandrake stared at a swift look accordingly.

"No one has come through that door for at least ten minutes, sir," said the man. "Twenty of us have been outside waiting to go down the mine. I've been there ten minutes, and I'll never see him come through."

"The murderer couldn't have gone down in a lift," said Mandrake. "Carlos and I have been waiting up in one for the past ten minutes. The other was at the bottom of the shaft when we started and is still there now. The man down must have gone into the oxygen plant, and he must be there now."

"No one passed me, sir," said Hewat emphatically.

"Think what you are saying," snapped Mandrake. "You are branding yourself a murderer."

"The idea's absurd," said Hewat.

He came to a stop. Without doubt he was in a perilous situation. Ambrose could not have shot himself in the back. The murderer could not have slipped from the shaft standing by means of a lift or through the door leading into the main section of the shaft.

That left only the door of the control room which still led to the oxygen plant. Men stretched from the plant by Carlos were that no one had entered the plant for half an hour. Carlos insisted that the control room was empty, on any point to observe was it afforded not the slightest cover for a man to hide.

"You've been on bad terms with Ambrose for weeks," said Mandrake suddenly. "Those two have fought each other. Once you passed him with a fairly oxygen apparatus."

"That was an accident, sir," protested Hewat hotly. "And I risked my life saving him, and into the station when he collapsed."

"Did you murder Ambrose, Hewat?" asked Carlos suddenly, his furtive eyes resting on him for one fleeting instant.

"I did not," cried Hewat, angered at the insinuation which he saw on the face of every man present.

"We'll go in the control room again, sir," said Carlos. "And I risked my life saving you!" said Carlos. "Did he pass you and did you miss after him and pull a revolver from his holster and try to hit him in the back? Did you do all this? All the evidence is to the effect that you did."

"I agree," snapped Mandrake, while Hewat fought for self-control. "Hewat, you'll go back to Earth for trial. The hall of law, two of you."

Two heavy doors spring forward, only to reveal as Hewat whipped up the ray revolver he was still holding. He had seen a strange gleam in Carlos's furtive eyes and a coldly triumphant one in those of Mandrake.

The attention had swung through him that Mandrake and Carlos had noted Ambrose, and had then stepped into a lift and shot it, shutting down, only to re-

Accused of a Killing

...and I hang it up again just as three to appear as if he was standing near Archibut's body with the revolver in his hand.

"Up with your hands, all of you," he said, "and out." "You too, Mr. Mandrake."

There was a grim look on his ready features. To a dull and apprehensive stand to his

BELT

He had no idea why Mandrake and Carson should have murdered Archibut, but he knew instinctively that they had done so and hoped to damn the crime on to him, so that they had succeeded in that every man in it even obviously believed in his guilt. "Listen to me, men," he cried. "I am innocent of the murder of Archibut. There is no murderer."

He gestured towards the mine manager and his assistants. He finished as many of it as he could laugh contemptuously.

"You carry on," snapped Mandrake. "Why should I murder Archibut? He's one of the best men I've ever met, and I've reported as such many a time. No, Hewitt. You see the mine, and holding as up like this won't help you. You can't leave the station."

Hewitt realized that Mandrake was speaking the truth. Like all other men at the station he had a metal wall filled with an oxygen generator and a heating and cooling system for making short excursions along the twilight belt, but Hewitt knew that if he made a gateway in this wall he would soon have to come back to the station. Nor could he escape in the rocket-driven space ship, for it was too difficult to pilot alone. It seemed that he was trapped.

"What will you do if I surrender?" he asked.

"I'll have Hewitt released to send police help," answered Mandrake. "I'll have you put in the cells till they arrive. They'll take you away, and you'll hang."

Sleeping a too good for a rotten snail who can't see a man in the back seat of a deep night," sneered Carson.

The promise of agreement which came from the station brought a fiery light into Hewitt's eyes. Still covering them with his fingers he backed towards the door of the control room.

"I'm not surrendering on those terms," he snapped. "I'm staying in the control room till the police arrive, and everyone else is moving out. I'm fixing control equipment to both doors, and my attempt to open them will throw the oxygen plant out of action—and you know what that would mean."

He saw consternation flash on the faces of Mandrake and Carson, while more than one man went pale. The oxygen plant was the heart of the mining station, pumping life blood through it. Its failure would mean death to all men who could not crowd into the space ship. Most of

them would have to face in their metal suits and die within long eight hours at longest.

"The plant itself can get into the plant through the outside door," concluded Hewitt. "From now on the control room is mine."

As he uttered the last word he stepped back into the control room and slammed the door, shutting him the heavy steel bolt. Crossing to the opposite door leading into the oxygen plant he closed that as well.

For the time being he was alone—and could think.

* IN THE DIAMOND CAVE

FOUR hours Hewitt sat alone in the control room and tried his brains for a way out of his dilemma. He realized that escape was impossible. He had to prove the guilt of Mandrake and Carson. Knowing that they were guilty was not enough. A jury would demand proof.

"What possible motive could they have for murdering the man?" Hewitt asked himself a hundred times.

The only thing he could think of was that Archibut might have been blackguarding Mandrake and Carson, but he could not picture either Archibut as a blackguard or the two men as a his brother's victims.

Neither was a respectable member of society entitled of losing the reputation of a blackguard. Had they been they would never have accepted positions at the mining station as Hewitt. They were tough characters, tougher even than the miners they controlled.

Tired of thinking round and round in a circle without finding a motive for an apparently senseless murder, Hewitt set to work to examine the station and to see whether there was any chance open to him

other than to sit passively in the control room until the police arrived and had him out, as they surely would.

It seemed to him that there was a good chance that he might succeed in leaving the control room and making his way across up to the living quarters of Mandrake and Carson. It was almost certain that the two men would be taking over the events of the day, and by overstepping through a constituting staff he might learn why they had murdered the unfortunate miner.

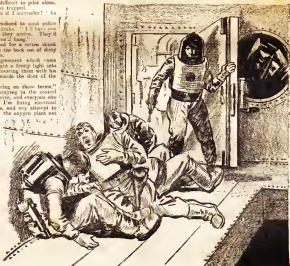
Finally Hewitt unlocked up his doors of control the pressure underground. He knew Mandrake too well to fear that the usual routine of the station had been interrupted, especially as Mandrake drew a high commission on output.

That meant that twenty-five miners were down in the mine, twenty-five were asleep, and twenty-five were off duty in the recreation room. To reach Mandrake and Carson it was not necessary to pass near the latter. The oxygen plant cars were well out of the way.

The only danger lay in the possibility of an armed guard having been posted in the shaft chamber outside the control room.

Hewitt gave a grim smile. Turning to the big control board he scrutinized the rows of indicators which showed the chemical composition of the air in every part of the station. It was his duty to keep it at a normal composition of 20.95 per cent oxygen; 760.2 per cent nitrogen; 0.05 per cent argon, neon, krypton and xenon; and 0.05 per cent carbon dioxide.

After a moment's thought he pretty twisted the carbon dioxide dial of the shaft chamber and the miners' recreation room, increasing the proportion of the gas in the latter by ten times to make the off-duty men dreamy,



Revolver in hand, Hewitt opened the control room door and stepped in. The four guards lay, huddled on the floor, mouths wide open and breathing mercifully.

In the Cave of Diamonds

and shut in the shaft chamber sufficiently to send any gas leaks there imperceptibly all to sleep.

Having waited doggedly for half an hour to give the gas time to act, he quietly opened the control room door, revolved it back.

Four guards had been posted in the shaft before. They were sitting on the floor with their backs against the wall. They yawned lazily against one another, breathing unconsciously with open mouths and flushed faces.

Hewitt waited no time in staring at them. He looked the control room door from outside. Soft-footed he stole from the shaft—careful, along a steel-matted passage, and up a spiral staircase.

His heart gave a leap as he reached the top and he heard the voices of Mandrake and Carson. They were talking in their room with the door ajar. There was no need for Hewitt to go nearer. He settled down to listen.

"I had to say the same, you fool," came Mandrake's voice. "He had to be killed before he gave the game away. He refused to come in with us. There's not a man in the station who don't convinced that Hewitt did the killing."

"I'd feel safer if we had Hewitt in the cells where we could keep him off quietly," said grateful Carson. "As it is the police will have him out, and he'll talk to them. They're not a pack of green-skinned monsters. They'll realize we could have done anything in just as easily as Hewitt. I don't feel safe, chief."

"Well, I do," came Mandrake's retort. "I'll kind things out. What possible motive could we have had for killing him? That's the point that shames us from prison. And to get your mind off Hewitt, how about going along and having a look at the diamonds?"

"Yes, let's go, chief," came Carson's eager reply. "I'll get my space suit on. We'll get on by all right C and no one will see us from the station. I'll dig down to Carbide and tell him to take charge, and keep quiet about our being away from the station."

Hearing Carson speak up, Hewitt stole sharp footsteps. At the moment he passed, so far he had learned nothing of value. He could either return to the control room or wait there when he left it, or follow Mandrake and Carson to wherever they were going outside the station, a difficult and perilous task.

The fact that it was a matter of life or death to him in solving the mystery of Ann Bates's murder decided Hewitt to follow the two men, and when they entered his back C he was waiting there from round the end of a corridor.

To enable him to get back into the control room Hewitt had also the door to the door looking into the engine plant. He prepared to come back through it, without plank, trusting that his sudden appearance would enable him to get the drop on the rascals there. He had also set the carbon dioxide clock at normal again. The guard in the shaft chamber would awake and continue guarding the empty control room.

Hewitt gave Mandrake and Carson five minutes to go clear of the station before he followed them, passing through the airlock into the world outside. The two men wore a hundred yards from the station and the appearing behind a ridge of rock.

The men, a huge hall of white fire hanging low on the horizon, but pitifully low on Hewitt's left eye as he started off on their track. They went along the main side of the twilight belt, thumping their way between huge boulders that lay half buried in the white and yellow snow. Further on on the last side of the planet were lakes and rivers of molten metal and oozings of molten lava bubbling steadily in the tilted fields of heat.

Hewitt knew that it was safer for him to keep in the darkness so he bore away into the

night-ridden fringes of the twilight belt. How was better cold and eternal darkness that longer eyes more intense away from the twilight belt, terrifying aspects of my darkness when the last vestiges of the illumination as they faded forever as solid oxygen and trapped.

Hewitt increased his speed until he drew level with the sea men, and for four hours the strange chase went on. Mandrake and Carson fought their way along in a blinding light and intense heat which was only partly mitigated by the cooling systems of their space suits.

Hewitt stumbled along in darkness and a cold so intense that it numbed him until his hearing organs worked at full capacity. Between the two men and their reason broke by the strange twilight belt that resembled Mercury.

At the end of the four hours the two men came to a gigantic ridge of grey rock. Hewitt observed that it formed a vast circle several hundred feet across. He watched the two men climb up it and disappear over the top, going down in whatever way within it.

By the time he had crossed the twilight belt and climbed on the ridge they were far below in the rocky bottom of the vast circular bowl. Hewitt gazed and pointed as he lay on the slope and watched them disappear into a crevice between two great rocks.

Confidently he began to descend. It was not an easy task for his space suit, hampered for movement, while the slope of the bowl was perpendicular with loose rocks. Also he had to keep on the alert in case the two men came out suddenly and caught him. He knew that he presented a fine target, while they could shoot at him from behind cover.

Hewitt crept at the crevice away which they had disappeared suddenly. In it he saw a thousand tiny eyes which extended backward into a permeable gloom, its floor sloping steeply down towards away from the entrance.

About a hundred feet inside the cave were Mandrake and Carson. The former was cutting the beam of a powerful electric torch on to the hard floor of the cave, while the latter sat down on his haunchs and knee typically in the darkness with a look of relief.

While Hewitt watched carefully Carson brushed his suit and rose to his feet with a round object the size of a coconut in his ripped hands. Both he and Mandrake were dressed at a patch of white ice excitement, and their voices, steady and clear as they emerged from the lead apertures built into the cliffs of their space suits, whirled and echoed round the walls of the Mercurian cavern.

"Archie was not exaggerating," cried Mandrake. "Look! that's a diamond if you like. Why, I mean, you'd get the biggest cut diamond in the world from this, and out of the smaller pieces you'd get diamonds worth a million pounds."

"Now you would, chief," came Carson's reply. "And there's more diamonds where this came from. Show your torch here."

* THE ACCUSING WHISPER

HEWITT'S fingers tightened on the butt of his revolver.

At last all was plain to him.

And now he had found the signs of diamonds. Probably they had been looked of casual curiosity to equally casual residents of the planet in a way that had been a part of work they could not see the last trace. Archie had reported his find to Mandrake and Carson.

Logically the diamonds would belong to the Mercury Mining Company which had bought from the government of Earth the right to all minerals and gas in the planet. Mandrake and Carson had suggested keeping the find secret.

And now he had refused to become a part of the crooked scheme and had been forced to order men at the station. Even all Hewitt could do to retreat his

self from nothing out with his say just blurring. Such a procedure would have benefited him in the slightest. He controlled himself, knowing that what he had to do was to induce the men to acknowledge their guilt before independent witnesses.

"The station is an old Babel tower," cried Mandrake. "We said again it is carefully, though. We'll get back to Earth with enough diamonds to make an industrial revolution here, and we'll find them somewhere on Earth. Now's a suitable place. By good, it was well worth while killing Archie."

The words came Hewitt's ears. He stared at them. "The men said the men would be back earth and that Mandrake's torch shined and twisted, from his hand. Then Hewitt's voice whirled eerily round the caverns.

"So you two crooks tried Archie, did you?" he asked. "I expected as much, and now I know. My evidence will clear Hewitt, and I'll be back."

Finally with four tiny cracks heard the water, a strong noise whining round the caverns. Instantly they fell to their knees as Hewitt sat at their again, among you about their heads.

Realized that they would stay where they were for a time, he clambered hurriedly up the sloping side of the bowl, over the rocky ridge, across the twilight belt, and into the darkness beyond.

It was essential for the success of his scheme that he get back to the station without being caught by Mandrake and Carson. They could not have recognized him from his torso or from his appearance. To them he must have seemed some other member of the station staff who had heard Mandrake's confession to the murder of Archie.

Hewitt told them that Carson at least would crack under the strain and force Mandrake to take some desperate step that would prove their point just. Probably they would try to escape to Earth before the police came, rather than wait for the mysterious visitors to disclose his identity and reveal to having been a part of the crime of Archie.

Nearing the glowing station Hewitt suddenly saw a brilliant flash in the sky. A glowing space ship was firing its rocket thrusters suddenly in the white void of Mercury and dropping down towards the station. It was a police ship, armed with several prompters as answer to the radio call from the station.

Hewitt saw his space suit, figures emerge from the vessel and pass to through an airlock into the station. He turned forward and went to alert them. Fortunately no one was inside the airlock, and he had a chance to get right up to the end of the passage and into the ante-room at the end where the police men dropping themselves of their space suits. The station was built for Mandrake and Carson to be killed.

They looked round at Hewitt came in.

He looked to their leader, a black-faced brute with glaring blue eyes. He gazed, the helmet came across to the doorway and grunted Hewitt to draw him out onto the passage.

There Hewitt noticed that he had just what had happened in the cave of diamonds, and now Mandrake and Carson were probably as they say back in the station with some plan or other in mind for denouncing it. Hewitt told the station who had killed Archie and Carson to be killed.

"So you are Hewitt, eh?" sneered the lieutenant as Hewitt came to a stop. "The last police message we received when we were leaving Mercury was to the effect that you were in the control room of the oxygen plant. The radio operator handed a guess that you had killed yourself on falling could be heard of you. Well, you've certainly done a great lot of work on yourself, and I've noticed to believe you are in time. Mandrake and Carson will certainly be in a pretty nervous

Murderer Goes to the Gallows

when they come in, and I'll do my best to wrangle a confession out of them."

He paused, for a constable had tapped on the door and then put his head out into the passage.

"Here's a man by the name of Carlisle here—that the manager and his assistant are out of the station at the moment, but are coming along in the distance towards it," he said.

"They'll come in through the airlock, Henderson," said Hewat kindly. "What shall I do? Stay here?"

"You'll wait outside the outer door of the air-rooms," said the lieutenant. "I and my men will wait for your two horses in the ante-room. You'll come in with a towel on something over the helmet of your spare suit to hide your face when I call you, and I'll introduce you to your two horses as a witness who will swear that he heard these admissions to the murder. Mind you, if they don't confess, you'll come back to Earth under arrest. It's only doing it to give you a chance and become your sidekick of things true to me. Now make the air lock's going to open."

Standing outside the leather door of the air-rooms, with two police constables guarding him, Hewat heard Mandrake and Cannon come into the ante-room and greet the police lieutenant. The latter's voice shook a little, but Mandrake seemed as cool as ever.

"Quite work, lieutenant," he said. "It's only twelve hours since the parties was transported."

"He's new to the neighborhood, Mr. Mandrake," was the lieutenant's reply.

"We always try to keep no time in murder cases, you know."

"Well, the sooner you take your prisoner away the better," said Mandrake. "The fact has worried himself in the control room of the oxygen plant, but I disengage you'll soon have him out."

"You are convinced of his guilt?" snapped out the lieutenant suddenly.

"Witness will swear that he was the only man who could have committed the murder," replied Mandrake. "He —"

"Except you and your second-in-command," interrupted the lieutenant. "I have had a full account of the circumstances of the murder by radio."

"The idea that either Cannon or myself committed the murder is too stupid to entertain," laughed Mandrake. "What sports are you?"

"Nevertheless, I have a witness outside who will swear that he heard you admit to having committed it," rapped out the lieutenant. "Fetch the witness in you men outside there."

Hewat shuffled into the room, a towel over his helmet. He heard Cannon utter a loud shout.

"I tell you he'd be back at the station before us. Now we'll hang."

Mandrake's reaction to the situation was quick; then the look of a snake's tongue.

Drawing a revolver he seized the lieutenant full in the chest, sending him dead to the floor. The two constables' hands shot up into the air in obedience to Mandrake's commanding order.

"Cannon, get Carlisle at once," he

snapped. "Bring fast pistols and search them out to the police space ship. They will yield the three of us to Earth—after we have loaded the moving station out of orbit—and loaded up with as many diamonds as we can carry. Yes in the corner there take that towel away from your helmet, I want to see your face."

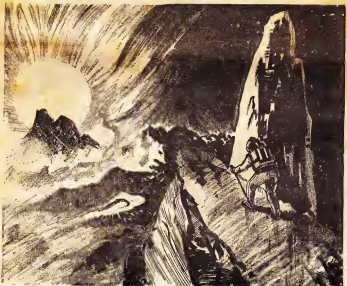
Back at least as the way things had turned out, Hewat stood a land and whipped the towel from his helmet. It seemed to him that Mandrake's language was complete.

Cannon was just passing Hewat, and the warning smile on his face was more than Hewat could tolerate. He snatched the towel snatching Cannon and clamed with Cannon in one continuous movement.

The towel wound itself round Mandrake's helmet, momentarily blinding him. He reeled automatically, and instead of hitting Hewat caught Cannon between the shoulders. The crowd bowed himself into an arc and then crashed dead to the floor.

Mandrake had no chance to shoot again. The constable was at him like lightning. He went down under them and was pinned in vainly to the floor.

It was the end of Mandrake's cooked scheme, a scheme which nearly sent an innocent man to the gallows. As it was he had well wend to the scaffold, while Tom Hewat, recovered a substantial bonus from the Mercury Mining Company, which changed its title to the Mercury Diamond Company and began to produce a steadily increasing output of some of the most winning diamonds seen in the whole history of the solar system.



The sun was a huge ball of fire, hanging low on the horizon, as Hewat made his way along the Twilight Belt.



The Great Six on Mars looked up at the huge bulk of Mollathner. "Where is your Companion?" one of them addressed him in English.

* MEN OF MARS

VOID of all animal life, the Earth contained an eternal journey round the sun.

Mars had come and gone, but still the great orb moved in its cycle. War, followed by plague, had made barren the Earth, and as Mars was the instrument of humanity it had managed to escape from the wreckage. These folk had built great spaceships and had left behind the war-torn people.

Sixteen years had passed and on Mars had grown four cities, populated by people from the Earth. New London, capital city of Mars, Paris 2, Great York, and Marina.

Head of the city of New London was Martin Raymer, one of the first men to come to Mars. He had come with Maynard in the first rocket ship to make a successful journey to another planet. There had been several to make that fateful journey—Hayward, the inventor of the space ship; Mary Lammere, his assistant; Martin Raymer and his sister Doris; Garsting, an astronomer; Mollathner, recorder of the journey; and, lastly, Mother, bull-headed creature who had boarded the ship by a trick.

The seven had met with diverse fates. Mollathner, plants had discovered Mother, Maynard and Mary Lammere had met their death in later planetary space. Garsting and Mollathner had been lost in the caverns of

the Matheson. Martin and Doris Raymer alone had come through unscathed.

The Earthmen had found that the Martians were an intelligent race ruled over by a government of six. They had harnessed electric power and had built a great city underground.

To the Earthmen the Martians were space in appearance. Instead of possessing a head these ladies were in two parts, in the upper of which were the eyes set far apart. They had a vague suggestion of a nose and had a mouth. Attached to the lower part of the body were two thin legs, and a tail higher than those, corresponding to Earth men's arms, were two short stumps, at the ends of which were two drooping like those on the back of a cock.

In the sixteen years that had elapsed since the coming to Mars of the Earthmen there had been many fights against the inhabitants of this world, who were all hostile to the Earthmen.

But the only real intelligence pitted against them had been the Martians. There had been many raids by armies and many money people had been snatched and despoiled by them. The great birds of Mars, too, had claimed victims.

Despite these adverse conditions, the population had grown from 2,000 to 8,000 in those sixteen years.

It was just after this length of time had passed that the Earthmen first heard of the

CITY

A sequel to one of the most popular stories we have ever published—"Cataclysm." From a dead world, the last survivors of mankind have come to Mars, and this is the epic story of the colonization of the Red Planet, of war with the Martians, and of the great peace that came to the world.

By W. P. COCKROFT

was that was being planned against them by the Martians. From a writer of government we have to try to find as much truth as we can, and what New the Martians tell us we shall have to make our best, and upon it we shall have to base most of the story. Let us go back to the capture of Garsting and Mollathner, where commenced the events that led up to the great war of Martian Year 26.

* IN THE UNDERGROUND CITY

GARSTING awoke with an aching head, and remembrance came back to him slowly. He knew he had stumbled in the passage, and the super hands of the Martians had pulled him back into the room. Yes, he was in the Martian power.

He looked around him, but there was nothing to see except the shining walls of the cave. Carefully he raised himself up from the floor and stretched for an exit, but there was none. He was not fastened in any way, but he did not doubt the fact that there would be no chance of escape. For a few moments he paced the room, then he saw the way he would go back.

Two Martians entered, and Garsting saw that they were armed with short instruments which resembled electric torches. Any doubts as to their nature were quickly dispelled when one of the Martians pointed his torch at Garsting and pressed a stud on the side of it. A punishing feeling stole over Garsting. The Martians switched it off again, and it was evident to the Earthman that the creature was only giving a demonstration of his power. One came into the room and stood behind Garsting while the other turned out the passage they had entered by. Evidently Garsting was expected to follow that one, or, without hesitation the Martians did so.

For a long time the Earthman was lost through a labyrinth of passages from which he knew that, if the time came, he would have great difficulty in escaping. As he was led onwards he thought about his companion and wondered where they were. He believed if they had managed to escape from the Martians, or if they had died fighting, he if they were prisoners.

Closely followed by one Martian and led by the other, Garsting came at last to a guarded door, which opened at a word of command, disclosing to the Earthman a large hall full of Martians. At one end was a platform on which six Martians were seated. Some conversation followed between the guards and the six, the result of which was that Garsting was led forward for their examination. Happily for him the examination was only a scrutiny; none of them had hands on him. The examination finished, Garsting was led away again and into a

of MAPS

small room at the side. For about twenty minutes he was left alone with his thoughts, which were not very cheerful. Then the more Martians, who had evidently been made his guards, returned and he was led out into the hall. There, to his surprise, was Melheimer.

"What? Have they got you, too? And the others?" he asked.

"No, not the others," smiled Melheimer, as cool as ever. "They caught me through my own fault."

"What do they intend to do with us?"

"After all, I know?" said the other, shrugging his shoulders.

Further talk was cut short by the approach of two more Martians, who exchanged a few words with Garsting's guards. Then they approached the Earthmen and ordered them—in two easy ways—to follow. Again the two passed through a bewildering maze of passages and halls, and it was a relief to both when a hall was called. Garsting slowly lowered himself to the floor of the small room into which they had been shown. It is difficult to recall their caves, as they have no resemblance to caves, owing to the lighting and paneled walls.

Melheimer pointed to his mouth and made some suggestive of wanting to eat. The Martians quickly nodded comprehension and went out, to return in a short while with two large bowls which contained some strange food. These bowls they put down at the feet of their captives.

"What is it? We do not know whether it is poison or not," murmured Garsting.

"Small harm to risk it," said Melheimer, smiling at his fate.

The German commenced eating, and apparently he enjoyed it, for he never ceased eating until the bowl was empty. Garsting had been in a while, but when he saw how Melheimer was enjoying it he also commenced to eat. The Martians stood by, watching and wondering.

"Good," remarked Melheimer.

"Good," echoed another voice.

The Earthman looked up in surprise.

"Good," repeated the voice of one of the Martians, gesturing at the empty bowl.

Melheimer smiled. "You eat it was good, old boy."

The Martians appeared surprised at this flow of words. He turned to his companion and whispered.

"They are nice," said Garsting.

"Yes," agreed Melheimer thoughtfully.

"I believe they want to learn our language."

"Korn or wine?" asked Garsting, laughing.

"The one we are talking to, of course. They will not know that we have been thus sent."

"What do they want to learn our language for? They will only kill us as savagely," said Garsting mockly.

"That remains to be seen," commented his companion.

For a fortnight the captives were kept in this cave, well fed and looked after, while every day the two Martians interrogated them, and in that fortnight had gained a good smattering of the English language.

From then Garsting learnt that they had been engaged by "the Great One" to find the meaning of the strange men's language.

"The Great One" was the name of the Martians. Although there were six, the Earthman learnt. When one died another was instantly elected to take his place. There were no resignations, even when a Martian was in a state of advanced senility.

he still continued to hold office until death deprived him of it.

Melheimer had cherished the two Martians in his own peculiar way, and the Martians learnt to acknowledge the manner he treated them and the other Earth. They became very friendly with the Earthmen.

After an attempt to get to know from where the Earthmen had originated, the Martians had given it up. Their thoughts had never turned to the study of the stars, for astronomy had never appealed to the Martians as being of any use. But at electricity Melheimer found they were experts.

All the walls of the room were a mass of electric fittings. In the front of them were two large transparent panels of some solid skin to glass. When a dial was slid open in a wall it threw the whole wall into light, and the electricity was put to rest from continuing its circuit.

Going to this fact the Earthmen realized that escape would be impossible from a room when the walls were illuminated.

One day they were taken by Krix and Gool for a kind of sight-seeing tour. It was a great event, for they were led their first opportunity of seeing in full the whole city and its wonders.

The Martians led them down a long sloping passage, and so they came to the city of houses—a strange "dormitory" where the Martians slept. They were large, and the floors were covered with a kind of grass, while the temperature of the rooms was the same as the temperature of the city. The ventilation arrangements were perfect.

Having examined that level to their satisfaction and at their leisure, the Earthmen allowed themselves to be led to a still lower level. The Martians prepared to take them down.

"Melheimer, Krix!" Are there no more on this level?" he asked their guides.

Krix hesitated. "Yes, but we cannot show them to you."

"Why?"

"They are the rulers' quarters."

Melheimer made no comment. He had wondered what methods these people had, as he had seen some laying any approach to familiarity. Apparently the female sex were kept well to the rear in Mars.

Gradually, as they descended lower, a hum began to become perceptible. Until at last they entered a hall that was greater than any they had seen before. The floor shook to the drone of the giant machine which almost entirely filled the hall. Krix stood back with an air of pride and inferiority. The Earthmen looked on with interest in it. As they went on, and everywhere the machine were hundreds of Martians, apparently engaged in seeing that the functioning of it was perfect.

"This was fine," said Melheimer, "does it work the lights and the ventilators?"

"Light, yes," Krix looked pleased.

Melheimer saw the machine. "Astronauts?"

"Yes," said the Martians, and he heard behind him. "Push us," he said, bowing deeply.

The Martians' face cleared. "Yes, work everything there is," he said.

Their tour finished, they were returned again to their room.

For many weeks they were accompanied with great exactness by them; the activity was decreasing to drive them out. They only occupation was the instructing of the Martians in the English language, and they did with all the rest they could.

Garsting had wanted to learn the Martian language, and had said as much to Krix, but

it was apparent that the Martians did not want the Earthmen to learn their language. When Garsting thought the matter over, he realized what a terrible course they had taken. The Martians had the advantage of knowing the Earthmen's language, while the Earthmen did not know theirs, and the two guards captured in Martian when they did not wish their captives to know what they were saying.

However, Garsting had gained up a smattering of Mars, and in this language he could talk privately to Melheimer. This putted the Martians very much, as they thought it was part of the same language as English, and they wanted to know the meaning of the words.

With difficulty Melheimer explained. Then, the Martians were unable to understand why the Earthmen should have two languages. One had always been enough for them.

"Are there any more Martians besides those who live here?" the German asked them one day.

Krix gestured. "Millions and millions."

"Do they all live underground?"

"Yes."

It appeared to the Earthmen that their captives did not know what to do with them. They were very interested in their life under ground, but they would have been more satisfied with an occupation.

WORK FOR THE EARTHMEN

"Krix!" remarked Melheimer, "you shall have to give us something to do, or we shall die of boredom."

Krix put his head on one side and seemed to think thoughtfully.

"What do you intend doing with us?" asked Garsting.

"It is undecided," explained Krix.

"One of the Great One want you to be killed and taken to the experimental chamber."

Melheimer made a very face. "A natural result," he said to Garsting.

He turned again to the Martians. "What do the other four of the Great One want to do with us?"

Krix shrugged his words casually. "A month party has gone out to find your position. The other four want to see what they obtain before it is decided what to do with you."

"How long keep they here away?"

"Three weeks."

"Three weeks!" asked Melheimer incredulously. "Why all that time? Are they searching Mars for them?"

"They have not return without certain knowledge," replied the Martians. "They will be killed if they do not bring back your companions alive, or else their lives."

"Then they are taking some finding," said Garsting, with comment.

"Perhaps our companions have killed the members of your month party."

"Perhaps so. To murder another month party party. There will be twice as many in the party, and they will be armed with more deadly pistols."

Garsting remembered the pistols which the Martians had once turned on them.

"Are they electrical?"

"Yes. There are two kinds. Those which merely paralyze, but having enough to set to do anything worse, and the strong pistols which will burn to death whatever they encounter."

"You know," continued the Martians excitedly, "you have thought of escape several times. If I was in your position, I should not try. If you were my way, you would be killed before you had gone any farther. There are always guards at the entrances and they are armed to kill. They would shoot you first and ask questions after."

"That is what they have been ordered to do."

The Colonisation of Mars

"Here, if the entrance are guarded, did our companions get away?"

"Through as old entrance that had fallen in due to the vibration of the machine. If it had been known that there was still a way where one could get through, we would have blocked it up entirely before the escape took place." He assured that it is totally blocked up by now.

"Gurting laughed. "You do make sure it is not the last way," murmured Carl, grins.

"So you want an occupation?" asked Aris, after a short silence.

"Yes but we do," said Melchiorer.

"I will see what the Great Six think," Aris departed.

After an interval of half an hour he returned.

"Come with me."

They followed him down into the depths to the room which housed the great machine. It seemed to the Earthmen that the floor trembled more than it had done before.

"Come this way," said the Russian.

They passed through the great room and along a passage which was more brilliantly lighted than any passage they had seen before. It was also much larger. For a distance of a quarter of a mile the Earthmen were led, then suddenly they came to a large hall it was in partial darkness. When their eyes became accustomed to the comparative gloom, they could see that many Martians were working in it. At one end the Martians were at work apparently examining. They were enlarging the hall.

In the centre of the room was a shaft which on further examination proved to be an elevator. The Martians were loading the elevator with iron. As they filled the elevator it was rapidly drawn up and replaced by a empty one. This happened continuously, so that the Martians were kept busy filling all the time.

"Are those being employed on the machine?" asked Melchiorer.

Kris replied: "Yes. What foolish questions you do ask. What else could happen in it?"

"What is all this for anyway?" Gurting questioned.

"It is a very machine mean that we are raising. The other rooms vibrates too much and is dangerous, being under the city. Only this week one passage collapsed and killed twenty people."

"And are you going to transfer the machine into this room?"

"Yes. One part of a floor, so that the machine never comes working."

The Martians worked skillfully and quickly, doing the necessary amount of work with the confidence of effort. The two Earthmen were intensely interested in the work that was going on.

"It will be a great deal better for us when this work is complete," said their guide. "You see," he continued to explain, "with the machine so far away from our houses we shall be safe from it, and the fate of Brum will never be ours."

"Demand! What is that?" asked Melchiorer.

"Demand was a great city, the greatest we know. The machine that ran the city was colossal, unbelievable in size! But the vibrations! It grew and threatened, but the inhabitants would not listen to the warning. Passages fell, but they did not heed. Until the time came when it was too late to heed! The whole city collapsed on the top of the machine, and everyone was buried with the exception of the guards stationed at the entrances. They fled, and came to our city, and so told us of their city's destruction."

"And that is why you are moving your machine?"

"Yes. We have carefully selected a site for the machine, after much discussion on the part of our architects. And here it is."

"Now," he continued, "let me show you the work you may do. It is simple, and we let the children do it. Perhaps when you

become more efficient you can be employed to look after the machine, and that would be a great bonus. If you are of some use the Great Six will not kill you! That is what the Martians love for, the salvation of his life! The only genuine position is to be one of the Great Six, and that is a position few can attain. One has to be very scrupulously to reach that position."

"And what way has one to be scrupulously?"

"In what way? Everything! He has to be a master of everything. That is the only way in which one can get to be a master of Redia, this great city."

"It is a position which I would rather have than the work of looking after the machine. And even then I am not particularly keen on the idea," said Melchiorer.

"The Martians looked at each other. "It is impossible for you to think that," he cried. "It would be wonderful to be one of the Great Six! Oh, if I was one! It is my hope that I shall become a member to the great machine. That is my ambition. I cannot hope to become one of the Great Six!"

The enthusiasm of Kris was very plain to see. He stopped suddenly as if he feared that he was saying too much.

"Come, to see. They followed the Martians to the entrance of the cavern again."

"If you can help to fix these points in position. They like a lot of lifting and work must be dropped, so be careful!"

The Earthmen looked at the Martians who were at work. They were evidently the electricians, for as they watched more lights flashed on where they were working. Another group was fixing the panels at the front of the lighted passage.

Apparently the panels would be more kind of antenna, for the Earthmen did not see any return. Kris said a few words to them, then departed. The Earthmen started work almost immediately. For hours they worked, and they were a very tired pair when Kris returned. That night they slept well. It was night, for they had no means of telling for the first time since the day they were taken prisoners.

Then passed more days, and days drifted into weeks, and at last came the day the Earthmen, then the outer world. They began to long again for the sunlight. Their outer wear, having them with unreasonably pulled faces.

Months passed . . .

* EARTHMAN BETRAYS HIS RACE

ON the outer wall, about three miles from the underground city, grew and flourished the first Earthmen's city of Mars. The two Earthmen made the citizens of Redia know nothing of the great disaster that had overtaken the people of the Earth; they knew nothing of the great race that had demolished the face of this world, one of the rugged remnants of humanity that had escaped from that holocaust of destruction in the work of Mars and comparative safety.

Comparative safety, yes. For here in Mars the Earth survivors had found plenty of enemies. The great cities of Mars had attacked their first city since then, and had reduced the growing population. Six months had passed, and it was amazing how these survivors worked, building the city and enclosing it with walls to prevent the ravages of their enemies.

We must now pass over four years to another occurrence in the career of Redia. It is an incident which remains an attempt at escape on the part of Gurting and Melchiorer.

Gurting and Melchiorer were alone. The great machine room was finished, and the work of transferring the great machine was over. It had taken three and a half years to transfer the machine, and now it was done. For the last three days the Earthmen had been working in one of the upper passages.

"To be sure," said Gurting. "I intend to try to escape."

"Why?" asked Melchiorer. "You will not get away with it."

"But I am going to try," replied Gurting. "Don't you ever want to see the outer world again? Don't you ever want to see the Earth again? Are you content to stay in this hall all your days? This is not life; it is a sad and a sad event! It is not worth living! Let us get away—let us at least attempt it. At the worst we can only die, and I think that is preferable to this living death."

"It is well," said the German, "perhaps we shall be given a chance to go out into the world again."

"What is happening out there?" Gurting asked, wonderingly. "There is something happening on the surface that we do not know about. Why the strange reticence of Kris? He tells us nothing new, nothing at all of what has happened in Mars and the others. If they had gone to Earth they would have come back before now to ask us. What catastrophe has overtaken them? For I am convinced that something disastrous has occurred. The city has not disaster in space, perhaps, certainly something unexpected. Why won't the Martians tell us? They may know what has happened. There must be something on the surface to make the Martians so reticent about our companions. We have made friends with about two score Martians. What do they say when we ask them about Mars?" They whisper. The Great Six know," and that is all we can get from them."

Melchiorer smiled. "All right. When you are ready to escape on an I."

Gurting was pleased. "Good. We will try to answer. The Martians let us know about almost as much as we like now. They do not dream of us trying to escape."

"I wish we could look up that machine before," said Melchiorer.

"Why?" asked Gurting, surprised.

"They have not done so long while we, I think, as to search the treatment of having their machine worked."

"Perhaps you are right."

The next day they were at work on the passage on the high level again. Early, after about two hours' work, the two Earthmen left their work and walked down the passage. The other Martians did not see any sense of them. Kris and Carl were not there. At the turn of the passage they quickened their pace and took the rapid passage.

They knew all shapes in Redia; apparently steps were unknown to the Martians. With abruptness, after proceeding for a few minutes, the Earthmen got their first glimpse of daylight for four years. Banned, they stood hesitating. The door way was twisting and showed an sign of guards.

Gurting edged along one wall, Melchiorer following close behind. Now Gurting could see a guard. He was standing a short distance away, looking along the walls below. With a start Gurting realised that they were high on the hillside—that they must have come out a lot higher than the opening they entered at the previous occasion. He stood staring out. There was something he could not quite make out on the plain below him. It appeared like a gigantic beetle. What was it? Like a flash he realised. It was a space ship, a space ship of great size! Astonished, he watched. But nothing moved. On looking closer he observed how deeply it was embedded in the ground.

"Good heavens!" Melchiorer breathed in his ear.

"Why, landlubber must have lost his mind," murmured Gurting.

"Look!" Gurting followed the direction of the German's pointing finger, and saw to the distance a line of smoke and the vague suggestion of a city.

"Why," he said, "Earth must be retreating Mars!"

Gurting instinctively moved forward, Melchiorer instantly dodged back, and

The Great Six—Rulers of the Red World

fixed upon a stone. The sentry turned and aimed his electric pistol on among Garstang. At the same moment Melhemer flung the stone. Both aims were good. With a horrible shriek Garstang fell to the floor, and a moment or so later having passed Melhemer Garstang tumbled forward and fell. His stone Melhemer flung caught the unfortunate guard between his eyes, and sent him flying.

Melhemer ran forward, and pulled up suddenly on seeing what was before him. It was a chess king of 200 feet to the forest, crumpled and still, Garstang's body lay below. The guard moved. The heroism asked him over the edge. Then he perked up the path, and looked for an avenue of escape. But there was no way down the cliff. It was a drop all the way round the ledge, and above it was an abyss. There was no possibility of escape from the ledge.

He heard the voices of approaching Martians. Quickly he dashed inside again, and went along a passage. The Martians came up the other passage and went out on to the ledge. Their guttural voices resounded in surprise when there was no guard. They went to the edge and looked over. Melhemer laughed maliciously, and pointed the way round. The four Martians had no time to lose, they just crunched where they stood, and fell over the ledge.

Melhemer turned. There were away now Martians approaching. They came to within. He dashed on what he deemed

the pistol, whether to fire it over the edge or to keep it. The latter thought prevailed, and he stealthily went along the passage as the Martians came out on the ledge.

The loss of his comrades did not trouble Melhemer a great deal. He had lived in too many wild places and had known death too well for him to hold life anything but cheaply. There was only one person's life he would not like to lose, and that was his own.

He descended again, by another way. The voices and passage all looked alike, so he had no idea where he was. Then he heard a voice calling to him. "Melhemer, Melhemer!"

It was Kris calling. He recognized the voice and went towards him, the two pistol held fearfully in his hand.

The Martians cried in surprise when he saw him.

"Where did you get that? Give it to me quickly before anyone comes."

He snatched it from the Earthman's hands. "What have you been doing?" he asked.

Melhemer laughed. "Not much. Where is the other man?"

"He is dead."

Kris thought about this for a full minute. Then he spoke again. "The members of the Great Six are waiting you. They will kill you for this. You have attempted to escape, and your companion has escaped."

He is dead," repeated Melhemer.

"I saw his body at the bottom of the cliff." Here did it happen? What else have you done? Have you killed some people? Where did you get this pistol from?"

"Easy, easy. One question at a time." "You may as well tell me all. I shall not betray you. And I shall be able to show you how much to tell the Great Six."

"All right, I will," said the Earthman, slowly he remembered the short fight on the ledge.

"You are good." The Martians whispered. "You need not tell them anything."

"Why are you so particular about me not escaping? Do you not want me to search my people?"

"Which and here you telling them all about us and our lives?" the Martians retorted.

He motioned Melhemer to follow, and the Earthman was taken to the hall of the Great Six again.

Melhemer was astonished when they addressed him direct in English. "What is your occupation?"

"I do not know," he answered.

"Where did you last see him?"

"When we left the passage where we were working Garstang was in front of me, and left me a long way behind."

"You are lying! Do you think that we cannot tell?"

Melhemer made no answer, so the one who seemed to be spokesman continued.

"Did your companion escape?"



The stone flung from Melhemer's hand and caught the Martian guard between the eyes even as the electric discharge burned through Garstang and sent him hurtling over the ledge.

"No, he is dead."
"I think that will be best if we tell you how before there is any real trouble."
"Do you think that will be wise?"
"Perhaps much wiser than letting you see."

"The Earthmen must come to their senses. If you let me first think of the help I can give you regarding my love of people, those whom you are planning to destroy."

"Do you want them destroyed?"
"Millheimer said himself once: 'I have as few as them. They have not attempted to kill us. They have left us, but left their love to the contrary, is due to our hands.'"

"Kindly what help can you give us?" asked the Martians.

"I can tell you of their habits, their methods of warfare, how best to counter them, and how to fight them."

"We already know how to fight them."

"Perhaps you do, but I can help you all the same."

"Leave us while we consider," said the Martians, and with a start of his hand to his "A-compass" link.

Millheimer walked out with his gun at his back. Outside they came to a hall, there to await the decision of the Six.

"So you taught them all to speak my language?"

"Yes," replied the Martians. "That was what I was engaged to do in the first place."

"What do you think this would tell us?"

The Martians shook his head. "I do not know. Martians, at least, will not go ahead."

"Is Martians the leader?"

"No, there is no leader, but Martians is the chief."

The opening of the door cut short all further conversation.

They went in.

"You can live," said the spokesman.

"But you have to give us all the help you can, and those you very soon into the work of making weapons to use against your own people."

Millheimer smiled.

Thus began the building of the weapons that Millheimer intended should obliterate from Mars all trace of the Earthmen, with the exception of himself. And then drifted by twelve more years in which one or two more battles took place, but in which no great attempt was made by the Martians to exterminate their enemies. This was due to the great research which was going on as a result of the revelations Millheimer was making to the Martians. Research which did not confine itself mainly to the war on the Earthmen, but to many other aspects of Martian life.

Millheimer proved to the Martians the benefits of conquest and the fate that would be theirs if they kept to an underground life; they would never be rulers of their own world.

And in those twelve years the Martians adopted the English language, deciding that it was better than their own.

Then came the time when they had to decide their action, and how to attack in force, for it must be remembered that the Martians had not had an inkling of the war on the Earthmen, but only had the matter in fight with the aid of the Great Six, and with the aid of Millheimer, the Martians of the planet to become masters of the whole of Mars and build on its surface great cities.

First came the building of the Earthmen; then they would rid Mars of its enemies. Then after that was done, they would build the other cities of Mars to the aid of the rulers of Mars, and the Great Six would rule the world.

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Then came the building of the Earthmen, and with the aid of Millheimer, the Martians of the planet to become masters of the whole of Mars and build on its surface great cities.

For twelve years the Martians did not fight him and with the open world, he was too perfect for them to risk being now that they had found him.

* THE BATTLE OF THE RED WORLD

OVER sixteen years had Millheimer spent in the underground city of Mars, and at last it seemed as if he was going to see daylight—literally. The weapons for the big fight against the Earthmen were ready, and in that very edge where the city had been built the Martians planned to place a great electric gun. Under the direction of Millheimer two of these had been made, and under his direction also they were to be fired. Millheimer would have been almost unrecognizable to his former associates. His face was pale and his hair was grey. But beneath the shaven surface was the same Millheimer, the same daring and cunning individual who had won one way or other on wonderful paths on Earth.

It was a great day for him when he came out on the edge again and saw the blessed daylight that had been denied to him all those years. As he stood on the ledge, surveying the warm sunlight and directing the Martians to bring the gun to battle position, he was being watched from what he estimated was a deserted space ship below. Through a lens pair of field-glasses he saw that he was watching them in the gun in position, and there was surely on every line of his face.

He turned to one of his companions. "Wolton, just take a look through those glasses. I do not like it. That thing that they are doing appears to be a large gun, but who is that with them?"

"It is an Earthman. There is no possibility of confusing him with a Martian."

"It is an Earthman," remarked Wolton, looking through the glasses, "but where does he come from?"

"There is not many possibilities," said Rayner. "It may be an old prisoner that they have captured from our city, when we have blasted the surface. Or I wonder? Can it be Martians and Millheimer?"

"Gazing! Millheimer! Those were two of the men who came with you in the first space ship, wasn't they?"

"That's right. We lost them in course of the attack of the Martians."

"Well, that is not the worst," said Wolton. "The thing that I am most worried about is what they are doing up there. When it is noticed on one city they will no longer be able to blow it off the face of Mars!"

"You are right," Rayner commented, solemnly. "It looks a particularly nasty job."

"We shall have to prepare the city for war," he added. "It looks that way, and we ought to be ready."

"Cannot we destroy that thing in some way before they get it going?"

"I cannot say, Wain. Suppose we get over the top and then drop a bomb. Do you think we could, Wolton? Look through the glasses and see if the cliff overhangs or not."

"No, I do not think it does," Wolton replied, after a careful survey of the cliff.

"You must still have to move quickly before they get it in action. It is only half-way through the morning yet, and it looks as if they intend using it today."

On the floor behind the space ship were the Martians on which they had come from the city, and bravely they awaited and stood back across the plain.

From the ledge Millheimer watched them. "They are doing well," he muttered. "Now they are off to work the city."

He plunged into the work of erecting the gun and took no more notice of the spreading armies.

At about one hour after noon the Martians from the city of New London observed a small host of men on the top of the hill.

By wireless the news had been flashed to the other cities of Mars to the nearby city of Paris, to the city of Great York, and to the city of Washington, the last of Mars, all immediately sent out a number.

As it was supposed that the Martians were concentrating in New London, all the means and children's ends, twelve years of age were sent to Paris 2. From the direction of Paris 2 and from the other cities were coming news—

—the fighting men. Cooks, some of them between the ages of fifteen and sixteen, were being sent to Paris 2 as a prize. They were sent instead of probable candidates.

It was not that they did not know who was amazing them—they did know, for some of the armies had had a taste of fighting the Martians before. It was steady attacks they sent the city of New London.

The Martians were not seen, making it plain, happily. Onward, warping, was Rayner and the half dozen men he had chosen to accompany him.

Rayner bent over and looked closely at the men below. At length he recognized him as Millheimer, for all his altered appearance. The gun seemed now almost ready in action.

Millheimer was a man of action, as the Martians, who were waiting it asked to point towards New London. Suddenly, Rayner looked at Wolton, who was trying to open the box which contained the lenses.

The lid had jammed.

"Hurry—"

A sudden flash from beneath a slight hill, caused him to spring quickly back. The great electric gun was going into action.

The space ship down below disintegrated and became a cloud of whirling atoms. There was a dull roar echoed back on the wind.

Now the gun was pointing at the city, directly at it. Millheimer was seen to press the button. The electric gun fired. Rayner took aim with his rifle and fired. With a cry Millheimer fell by the gun. The Martians crowded round and quickly took him out of sight into the cover. Others stood looking about, perfectly willing the action of the shot.

Millheimer must have given some word to the Martians, for another came out and took his place at the gun. For one brief instant as Wolton prepared to drop the bomb the electric gun was in action, cutting a road through the city of New London. A great cloud of dust filled the air over the place.

The bomb was fired. There was a terrific roar and pieces of metal flew high in the air. When these had dropped to the ground Rayner ventured another look over the edge. There were no Martians in sight, no large wreckage. Rayner looked at the stricken city.

"Another moment," he murmured, "and there would have been an eye."

"Come," he said to his half dozen men, "before the Martians see us."

But they were not seen. The Martians were moving then from at the bottom of the hill, got the air leaving New London.

Something seemed up against the sky. "What is that?" asked Wolton. They went nearer, to find a large structure—of the marvellous red wood. It was on the edge of the hill, and beneath it all down the hill side was broken earth that had been torn there.

"It looks to me like an elevator of some kind."

"Yes, they have been excavating below, and brought up the dugout rock by means of it."

"The Martians alone know how deep these caverns of theirs go," added Wolton.

He was wrong. When the Martians did not know they were there.

They commenced to descend the hill on the first day.

"Millheimer will know what has happened to the electric gun, and why it has happened," remarked Rayner, "and he will come trading us. Our best way is to go to the Martians."

side their ears. They will never expect to find us in there, but will search everywhere outside. Also we may be able to do some harm to their city."

"You think Melbourne is still alive then?" asked Watson.

Raynes laughed. "Yes. There has to be a dead town."

They descended the hill, warily.

"Look," whispered Watson. "There was an entrance directly ahead of them. Two Martians stood on guard, pistols held ready."

Raynes and Watson took careful aim. "Quick!" The two shots sounded as one, and the two Martians fell dead.

Watson laughed grimly. "That is two dead."

Quietly they entered the mouth of the cavern. Raynes, of course, had seen the Martian caverns here, but to his ears they were new, and they stirred excited interest.

"Black!" whispered Raynes.

They moved forward, weapons held ready. Raynes had picked up the two electric probes that had previously belonged to the Martians. One of these he handed to Watson and the other he kept ready for his own use. He led Watson back the way into the maze of passages but the cavern seemed empty, no one came forward to dispute their progress.

"I wonder if I did get Melbourne?" whispered Raynes.

They began descending. Not knowing the secret of the doors, they were forced to learn by the passages, and, as they went down all the time, they eventually came to the old machine room. Obscure to them was the passage that led to the new one. Raynes, closely followed by the others, went along this passage. Soon they could hear the hum of the machinery. Outside it came, and then they saw, at the inner end, two figures at the controls of the new machine that filled the great hall. It was bathed in the light from the central panels the strong yet soft, glow all seemed to shine on every part of the machine and the Martians were working on their benches.

"Back, before they see us!"

The Earthmen turned and went back along the passage.

"That machine has some great purposes," whispered Watson. "I wonder what it is."

"It probably runs the entire city," Raynes replied.

"Yes, that is what I think it will do. Something will be needed to keep the air clean in these passages, and also to illuminate these parts."

They commenced ascending again, and came to a fairly large one. Raynes looked puzzled. "I seem to remember being in here before," he murmured.

Now is the centre of the city was a great pit, and Raynes had fought once against the Martians in a cave that had a great pit in the middle of the floor.

The difference was the painted walls, had then, Raynes reflected it was possible for the Martians to have lived partly since he had been there before. Apparently the machine and powered all the passages and caverns. On the last occasion he had been here some of the passages and rooms had been dark.

"What's that?" asked Watson, pointing at the opposite side of the cave where was a doorway. They moved forward, but before they had reached it the door was closed.

"We're in a trap!" ejaculated Raynes.

"Come on!"

They ran for the door by which they had entered, but before they had reached that it closed.

The Earthmen threw their combined weight against it, but it remained immovable.

"They have us now," muttered Watson.

"Back!" said Raynes. "Stand back!"

They stood away from the door and Raynes directed the ray pistol at it. He pressed the switch. There was a hiss as the



An Up-to-the-minute News Feature on Martian Inter-Planetary

By P. E. CLEATOR
(President of the British Inter-Planetary Society)

Herr Zucker's Rocket

RECENTLY returned from a visit to London, where, in the company of Professor A. M. Low, D.Sc., and several other members of the British Inter-Planetary Society, I interviewed Herr Ferdinand Zucker, the German rocket expert, who hopes to shoot his postal rocket here in England.

At the time of my visit no definite arrangements had been made, but we learned that the prospect of the experiment taking place in the near future appeared promising. Because these notes are published some little time after they are written, it is possible that the time factor would appear to print the rocket will have been shot. Should this be the case, British readers will probably have learned all about the experiment; freely, from the newspapers and, later, from the news and film.

But Herr Zucker has other ambitious plans for the future, in the event of his first attempt being successful. He is planning to construct a much larger rocket here in England, with a view to establishing a regular rocket postal service between England and the Continent. This accomplished, he envisions the formation of a company for the purpose of postal rocket manufacture.

Everything, however, depends on the result of his first experiment.

My attention is not the door, but reaching out impatiently.

For a few moments he kept the ray of electricity fixed on the door, without result.

"Let us try one more," suggested Watson. "We may shatter the door."

The man hesitated and stood as they shot at the door. The wall died into darkness. Raynes went forward to see if they had succeeded. There were the letters where the bullet had penetrated, but the bulk of the door was as firm as ever.

"Frustrated," said the leader of the expedition. "We shall have to work over with the Martians once. But his goodness will keep your eyes on that dark wall. There will be no warning if they come that way."

Watson was thoughtful. "Remember that electric thing we saw at the top of the hill? I wonder if it is possibly any of that machine. We could use the heat of something coming from it. If it is, why not shoot something a little down it? It will reach this city of theirs, break it up. The lights will go out and the air will rapidly become foul. The Martians will die."

"We are not out of here yet," remarked Raynes. "If we do manage to get out of here your suggestion will be worth following. Let us do it."

The rest of his sentence was lost and decided never to be heard. For while he was speaking the lights in all the walls died out in the darkness now above the mouth of the pit with a weird phosphorescent light.

"Quickly, now!" whispered Raynes.

"Then look out!"

There was a rush of advancing feet. The electric gates once again swung, admitting a stream of the Martians. Raynes's men followed them, and the cave divided in the hollow dome of their ships.

Two of the Earthmen went down, screaming in agony that was abbreviated by the rays of electricity burst from.

"Cataclysm"

ONE of the latest productions of Andrew Leonard, of Budapest, who is a leading member of the American Inter-Planetary Society, is a film entitled "Cataclysm," which concerns a journey to the Moon.

All the details of the journey through space, and the actual landing on the Moon, are shown, exactly with the requirements of a journey as demanded by the scientific knowledge of today. Thus, while they of a similar kind, where the pressure of an atmosphere on our satellite has been conventionally assumed, the adventures in "Cataclysm" near and space scene while on the Moon!

Herr Ley to Visit England?

ON behalf of the British Inter-Planetary Society, I have invited Herr Willy Ley, one of the world's foremost authorities on rockets, to England. At the moment he is somewhere in the U.S. and it is to spare the time for the visit this year.

Although he speaks English fluently (and French and Russian, too), he has never been to England, and when I met him in Berlin in the early part of this year he expressed a keen desire to visit this country. Here my invitation.

I must also add that Herr Ley also speaks American! Several of the leading members of the American Inter-Planetary Society visited him in Berlin a few years ago. And even to this day he not infrequently exclaims, "I guess so."

And while making of invitations and of America, I am sure that I, too, have received an invitation. It comes from Mr. C. Edward Parsons, a leading member of the American Inter-Planetary Society, who has very kindly invited me to stay with him at his home in Connecticut, New York. Unfortunately, I cannot possibly make the trip this year, but I am hoping to do so next.

Raynes, conscious of good luck, he left him, a confused glow at the Martians. They turned and fled, leaving behind them their caverns dead and wounded on the floor.

Raynes sighed with relief. "I wonder how long these things last?" he murmured, looking at his electric pistol.

Watson, moving as a target arm, pointed of his at the half-light.

"Mr. yes. They just swung my arm a little. And yes!"

"The same. We have lost two of our men, though."

Raynes frowned. "The Martians shall pay for that."

The light came stronger, as a wall kept its illumination.

Suddenly, Raynes was moving, moving as he had never run before. He had seen the door on the opposite side, just along to the door. He had seen the door opening. There was a click, as the door came against it. There were voices again from the other walls suggesting all along there, but no more walls to go. Raynes turned with. Two shots had punctured them in vulnerable places.

"Here, now!" he called.

The others rushed forward to him. As he got near him he drew this edge and pulled like there. They did as he commanded, and slowly drew the floor from their comrades' efforts. At last it was back in the wall. With a click it automatically fell into position.

"Quick out, quick!" Raynes ordered.

The Earthmen hurried along the silent passages, luckily in the right direction, and came out at the same entrance as that by which they had entered.

They climbed up the hillside so that they could see the city from the plain. In the distance they could see a great light, being placed; the Martians were removing the resistance of the men from New London who had come out to meet them.

The Triumph of the Earthmen

Suddenly, as little party watched the bloody battle that was in progress. The Martians were coming, their electric pistols rapidly scattering down the Earthmen.

"When I get hold of that dead Nell," declared Rayner, "I'll chop her up."

"What is that?" asked Watson, pointing. A body again was rising into the air. New London, Rayner gasped. It was the only aeroplane on Mars that was armed, and it was the sister's machine. "Rayner, send it's machine," he cried.

"What fuel are you using?"

"Methane, extracted from those alienated plants, probably," Watson answered.

"There is no petrol on Mars."

Suddenly the Earthmen below were jumping back to the city. The Martians came on following, as the aeroplane hovered above them. A small object dropped from it, and there was a boom as it fell in the Martian ranks, scattering three bodies right and left. Again a bomb dropped, continuing the work of massacre. The Earthmen had in one reached the city, and were rushing in on the walls.

The Martians turned and ran.

From below the hill a shaft of light sprang out, as it would and touched the aeroplane. It crashed and fell to the ground as steam.

"Come!" Rayner yelled. "They fire at the electric gun down there!"

Beautifully they hunched and shot down the mountain-side. Now they could see the flag as it streamed. With a cry Rayner leaped the remaining ten feet up to the top of him, and the one called out and over in the red vegetation. "Look, they are at each other's throat!"

He saw another figure that moved out of sight in the Earthmen.

"Come with me," said Watson to his men. "We have still something to do."

They followed him round the hillside and to the wooden structure. From it came the steady hiss of the machine.

Watson bent down at the side of it and a coil of wire of the machine that he had coiled in the grass at the side and turned to his three companions. "Help me as to your shoulders," he ordered the silent of them.

On the strange point he was able to see over the edge of the machine, as it was hunched all round for about ten feet up. He stood for a moment. "Pick those bodies up, you two men, and go down the hillside with them. If you see Rayner in safe drop one of them on that electric gun, then run to the bottom of the hill and run in."

"I'm about three minutes after they had gone," Watson stated. "Then he heard the screaming accompanying the explosion of the electric gun. With that he dropped the bomb down the shaft. Quickly he jumped to the ground. "Dead," he shouted to the others. "He's shorter than you down the hillside. There was a terrific boom and the ground shook. Below ground the machine, suddenly underneath the shell, was shattered in a thousand fragments. The lights died out in every part of the city below. A red at all except along the passages. "What a war like thunder, passing collapsed on passage."

The whole body of the city of New London collapsed. Still it must go, even the hillside itself, with an million of horrors, collapsed.

At the bottom Watson met the other men and Rayner.

"Get him!" he asked, breathlessly.

Rayner nodded. "Yes."

"Now!" he continued. "Let us return to the city."

The Martians were not to be seen. As they reached the city the light at night had faded and the light of the plain, with its dead, was visible. . . .

New London was in a state of wreckage. Tortured and torn were the buildings that faced the path where the deadly air had not through. Many were missing that night in

the city. Outside on the plain the smoke of Mars floated on the dead.

Instantly, at the sight through the Earthmen walked, building up the shattered walls of the city and preparing for the attack they expected on the morning.

Rayner received the worst blow he had yet had. "The aeroplane which had not crashed had been piloted by his sister."

He was now the only survivor of the original seven to come to Mars. . . .

* THE LAST OF THE SEVEN

MORNING dawned, bright and sunny, without the threat of impending death. All the available forces of the Earthmen were concentrated in New London, meeting the attack from the enemy. All the available weapons were ready for use too. The Earthmen had found that the electric pistols gave out after a certain length of time, but they had also a hundred still usable. They possessed plenty of other weapons. But ammunition was getting scarce.

It was this afternoon before a severe war broke. From the direction of the bank over the Martians, guns and intent on killing the thoughts of their dead, considered killing their minds with an increasing hatred.

NEXT WEEK

Special features in next week's issue of Britain's only science story paper—

Onslaught From Venus

Venus strikes the Earth! Guided by a secret on the astronomical world, the Venusian reach the Earth in giant, impetuous space ships. Horror and destruction in an amazing story of inter-planetary advances.

The Mines of Halder

Explored by the Reichsmen of Mars! Impregnated in the volcanic mines of Halder, surrounded by snakes that radiate death. Exciting, tense. . .

Death Broadcasts

Death's grand finale! An amazing drama unfolds on the waters of Yarkubite in the ghastly attack on the Mariner and his crewmen. Thrills unending.

In SCOOPS Next Week

On these men who had come sweeping their lands, the wall of the city Rayner had fired up a great catapult that was to throw bombs at the approaching armies. It was made in appearance, but it worked scientifically, and that was what mattered most. Now to the Martians moved, Rayner prepared to fire it. Any slip and there would be disaster to their own forces. Rayner placed the first bomb on position and drew back the catapult along to its furthest extent. The bomb tore through the air, and dropped in the front of the oncoming forces. It detonated, and the Martians withdrew.

Rayner laughed heartily. "Let's give them another," Watson.

Again a bomb made its parabola through the air and alighted too much in front of the Martians.

A fraction of an and two planes appeared there. They circled round, out of range in the catapult.

Now the whole city was ready for them, fighting men lining the walls and waiting for the first shot. Rayner carelessly distributed the electric pistols among his men, at strategic points.

The Martians halted a short distance away. Cautiously to make another move, the Earthmen waited.

One of the Martians came forward, his arms held high.

"We demand your surrender," said that condition we agree not to harm you."

A few seconds ran through the ranks of

Earthmen on hearing the Martians address them in English.

After a moment's thought, Rayner answered.

"If it is to be war, then we will fight against you to the last man. We will not surrender. We will agree to have peacefully sole by side with you, people, however we must do war with you."

"I am Marton, one of the Great Six," announced the Marton, "and we demand unconditional surrender as the integral rules of the world. Unless you acknowledge us now as your rulers, we will slaughter you a one of you."

Rayner turned to the army of Earthmen.

"What has it to be, men?"

"War!" came the answer.

"The Martians bowed his head."

"At night, there was a star."

He returned to the army of Martians, and announced their instructions.

"I believe they are going to attack on all sides at once," whispered Watson. "Don't you think that it would be best to do this the greatest at certain points all round the city?"

"Yes," replied Rayner. "Go and deliver them out."

Watson went round with the small bands, handing them out to men at intervals all round the walls.

Then the Martians attacked. With a roar they swarmed down on one side of the city, to be met by a hail of grenades. Nothing could withstand that deadly hail and they retreated.

Part of the army made a determined attack on the opposite side, to meet with the same result.

Against the Martians swooped from all sides at once. Some a gun, a machine gun, a tank, a car, and great, flying columns. Rays of electricity flashed and men fell, mangled and blackened, never to rise again. Rayner saw before him the Martians who had come forward to parley with them, and he saw they met. . . .

The battle raged and raged all through that fatal evening. It seemed as if the Martians would get the upper hand; their numbers doubled that of the Earthmen.

But the Earthmen, knowing what was at stake—this time and the lives of those whom they held dear—fought desperately.

And now a strange conference was taking place. For the Martians had given up; the bombs had all been used, and there were few electric pistols in action. Mutual hatred fighting was taking place along the walls.

With dramatic rebelliousness the end came. A Martian cried his arm. "Sleep!" he cried.

The fight ended, and the men stood as they were, waiting to hear what the men had to say.

"I am the last of the Great Six," he said. "and as such I authorize the surrender of my people."

There was a hush of talk among the Martians.

A great cloud of smoke billowed up over their heads. New London was no more.

In two seconds the survivors of the battle—conquered.

Watson, after looking for Rayner, stepped up to the Martians leader.

"We are prepared to let you live peacefully, as requested. But now you must acknowledge us as the rulers. We shall not interfere with your activities, provided that they are not enough on us. That is all."

The Martians agreed, and as the men descended the steatite dikes they departed back in the direction of their sacred city.

Watson looked, a little sadly, at his remaining men.

Rayner is no more and New London is no more. He gazed at the bloody city.

"Let us depart for Earth before nightfall," Watson and went, the Earthmen made their way to the city of Earth.

Night descended on Mars. Night and peace. . .

Modern

Ideas that are Making
a New World

TUNING-IN BY LIGHT

A NEW device—fluid light—allows owners of latest radio sets to tune in absolutely accurately to any given station without listening to a single broadcast note.

Fitted to a slot on the front of the set is a little green light. As each station is tuned to the green light goes out, when the highest note is reached, the set is accurately tuned to the station in question.

The fluid light cuts the time needed to tune by something like 15 per cent, and it will even be possible to tune the set on a station by watching only the green light. Then when the accurate tuning stage is reached the volume control is turned on and the perfect programme of sound is heard.

From The United States, London, and an accompanying graph device used for the delivery of milk.



SCOOPS

A. B. C. of SCIENCE

Scientific terms and theories
told in plain but unadorned
words.

Blood.—Produced as a motor spirit from blood coal. Contains Benzene (C₆H₆), Toluene (C₇H₈), Xylene (C₈H₁₀), etc., and is a very clean and better than petrol engine motor. Produced from the distillation and condensation of gases produced by burning coal at great temperatures.

Burn.—Rapid chemical change with very great heat in India and China. Affects the nervous system, paralysis being a common symptom. Found to be due to the practice of eating too much polished rice—the rice lacking the vitamins content of the outer husk.

Boyhood.—Period of human, children, adolescent group. Very hard—sturdy play or education necessary as a rule, such as the natural game hunt and snail.

Booby.—The study of living organisms. Includes the problems of evolution, variation, heredity and natural selection. Booby was the father of modern thought on these great problems.

Brown.—Dirty white colored metal, red tinged and of lustrous crystalline nature. Used in medicine, in indigestion, etc., and is a factor in the production of silver and other when easily fusible metals.

Blanking.—Process of whitening materials by passing oxygen to react with the coloring matter present. (Known as reduction.) The most widely used reducing agent is bleaching powder made with chlorine gas. Sulphur dioxide gas is used for more delicate fabric, which are mentioned and left exposed to the gas fumes in a special chamber. Hydrogen peroxide is another agent which can be used at home. The old-fashioned method of sunlight bleaching was hardly less than the chemical means in that it did not affect the strength of the cloth. The hot process was probably caused by the sun's action causing the moisture and oxygen present to combine with the dye.

Bulls Eye.—An astronomical line discovered or attributed to the astronomer, Henry Martin Johnson. It is defined as the relative distance of the planets from the sun. The numbers 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, are the approximate relative distances from the sun of the planets Mercury, Venus, etc.



TRIUMPH OF MOTOR-CYCLE PLANE

DESIGNED by a French war pilot, a glider, equipped with an auxiliary engine in the form of a motor-cycle motor, has just put up a performance which should make the ultra-light aeroplane much nearer realization.

The total height of this power glider was only 34 feet, and the wing span was just over 40 feet. The power unit was a two-cylinder Douglas motor-cycle engine.

In the course of a long flight the little plane averaged 40 m.p.h., and over certain sections this was improved to 75 m.p.h. Yet this fine performance was obtained on a petrol consumption of only one gallon per hour.

FIGHTING OVERLOADING

ANY commercial vehicle on Britain's roads is now liable to be stopped and put through a searching series of tests as to its roadworthiness.

One of the most of the equipment of 100 cars in the road of commercial motor vehicles, which have been given powers almost equal to those of the police.

Various officers are now expected to the police with a view to prosecution, or else to the Traffic Commissioners, who may deprive the owners of the vehicle of their license. Broken, badly, and the heavy the drivers have been on duty will be the main points to be argued into.

These regulations have been applied with a remarkable machine to test the loads carried. The apparatus is portable, and the driver of the heavy being examined is asked to pull over to the side of the road, and the vehicle's load is tested there and then.

CRACK SHIP OF THE SEAS

NO effort is being spared to make No. 134, Britain's challenger for the blue-ribbon of the North Atlantic, the greatest vessel in the world.



At present work is being pushed ahead on the great hull of this 70,000-ton giant in the drydock on the Clyde, from which she will be launched by Sir Sydney de Grey in September.

In size, at least, she will have the distinction of being the greatest, for "134" is 24 feet longer than her nearest rival, the French liner *Nivola*, which is now being completed.

Apart from the ship itself there is much work to be done. Included in the plans for the launching of the great hull is the equip-

Marvels

Discoveries that are
Foretelling the Future

ICE-SKATING—BUT NO ICE!

YOU can enjoy all the thrills of ice-skating without ice by means of a new German invention.

The skates are fitted with endless "caterpillar" chains which allow the skaters to glide easily and swiftly on all kinds of surfaces.

If this idea "catches on," everyone will be able to skate—on pavements going to work, or in the backyard—and the highly expensive ice-skating will become a thing of the past.

THE PLATE-WINGED PLANE

THE designers of the latest attempt at a "safety" aeroplane have provided it with an extraordinary plate-like wing.

The illustration shows how the wing is attached to the fuselage. We should imagine the experts who are all for greater vision for passengers and pilot would have quite a lot to say concerning this design!



It is claimed that the plane will come to earth more slowly than even a parachute, and that a landing can be made in a twenty-five foot circle at an angle of sixty degrees.

Plans of this strange aeroplane being put through tests certainly show it making some headway, but the take-off does not seem to be as good as that of the latest categories.

Which type will be the best garden "plane of the future?"

most of thirty six days which with a total weight of 350 tons to keep the ship in check, in addition to six towing "tugs," each weighing 30 tons.

To make sure of perfect control on board the ship, the makers of the cables are speed-

Our artist's impression of the
new Challenger.



ing 415,000 on one experiment alone. This has involved the building of sixteen field-stud cables similar to those prepared for the ship, which are being set up and fitted out at one of the shipyard's buildings.

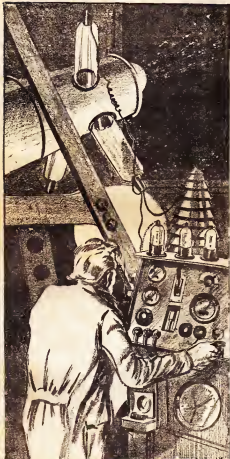
Members of the staffs of the Concord Gun, pay and John Brown and Co., Ltd., the makers, will sleep in their cabins to test out their comfort.

If the testees are not satisfied with their "accommodations," then the design will be altered until the most comfortable cables have been evolved!

The World Trembles when—

By Captain John
WILLIS

DEATH



The gates of Dartmoor Prison disappearing in a cloud of fine dust. Terror, ghastly slaughter and panic, when a thousand convicts, crazy with sudden freedom, break loose.

* A SLICE FROM AN EXPRESS

THE more careful attention to detail that had raised him to the Managing Directorship of the British National Bank could not fail to make a success of the first and only crime of his career. Mortimer was sure of that. That was in itself it would be compelled to finish the position at head of one of the country's biggest private banks for that of comfortable retirement in some foreign clime where the extradition laws could not reach him, he had looked for years.

Ever since the fever of speculation had gripped him Mortimer knew in his secret mind that it would end this way. You can't lose ten thousand in a year out of a salary of four thousand and no private income. He'd had to feel the money shortage, and the reserves of the British National Bank provided a, some-very soon now—his fellow-directors would know. And, because of that, Mortimer was ready to put his carefully made plans into execution.

Harvey Mortimer, head of the British National Bank, was about to disappear. It was all quite simple really. He would go on to the catering branch on business. His secretary and chief clerk already knew; the former had been authorized to purchase the first class return ticket and make the necessary hotel reservation.

It would be during that journey that Mortimer would disappear. . . and they wouldn't find him. Then his death would discover the extent of his defalcations and may be they'd suspect suicide. Fling himself into one of the rivers that the train crossed; that might account for no body being found in the estuaries. Sidney H. Harrison would be coming the Atlantic in South America.

He'd work until the train had almost reached Liverpool before he looked through at the lavatory on the train. Then he would shake off the monotone that he had carefully cultivated during the past three years. He would do his hair, don those heavy horn-rimmed spectacles, change into the voluminous clothes that he carried in his suit case . . . and say to Sidney H. Harrison, manufacturer's agent. Faked proposals are easy to secure if one knows the details and is prepared to pay the price. He would board the steamer at Liverpool two months before it might sail. He had seen even the details of his death since and he knew that nothing could go wrong.

Mortimer had seventy minutes to catch the Liverpool train when he left his office at the London branch of the British National Bank. He took a taxi to his favourite restaurant, sat in Park Lane, and calmly ordered his dinner and that he was not to be disturbed. From the cupboard of his study he took the false bottomed suitcase that he had purchased in Paris a month ago. In this secret receptacle he packed a hundred thousand pounds worth of negotiable bonds that his devious family members were locked in the vaults of the bank. Then he packed the clothes, hair-ays, spectacles . . .

With fifteen minutes to spare he took a taxi to the station.

The Manager, watching him enter in the

BROADCASTS

score of the newfinder, kept the taxi in view all the way from Rock Lane. The Master, the mystery individual for whom Rust had been waiting the country, the man who controlled the silent terror that brooded, sudden death and destruction. Crawled now in the wonder control room at Road Nine Farm . . . watching every move of the unsuspecting Mortimer traveling to a taxi on two hundred miles away.

Mortimer smiled as he thought of the narrow, paper-covered headlines announcing his disappearance. The Master's face was expressive as he thought of the same thing. For the Master knew that, though Mortimer would die today, his Master would never be born.

In another two or three minutes the taxi would reach the departure platform of the Liverpool Express. The Master kept over the great keyboard of switches that was the control panel of the Destroyer, with one hand he flicked the switches, with the other he turned the dial of the wave dial to keep the speaking tone in sight until a tiny car appeared on the view finder and, so the Master's slender finger slid over the keyboard, the "X" flashed across the screen until it was disappeared again, the drawback of the talk. Simultaneously, the Master's hand stabbed down on the discharge lever.

That was the only occasion on which the Destroyer failed to reach its mark. A split second before the great burst of the Destroyer vanished to find the cab driver waving not to pass a stationary automobile. The taxi cab continued on its way, the "X" flashed into the air. Not by a flicker of an eye did the Master betray his assumption.

He kept the cab in sight, waited to take it. He saw Mortimer climb from the taxi and slip a red shawl over the cab driver's pale, now less worried to his reserved compartment by a police. Now the train moves slowly out of the station, still leading over the view finder.

While Mortimer leaned back in the privacy of his first class compartment a young man sat down in thought on a distant coach of the same train. For Billy R. John Castle was one of Lord Tremblay's bright young men, and he had a problem to whom the problem of discovering and stopping the man and the machine that had the world at its mercy.

When Chief Detective Inspector Hargrave had told him that he was going for his Big Game he had been excited. And now—but he wasn't worried regarding the man and the machine that belonged to the Master—he was not so sure of himself.

Castle knew Mortimer; his recent experience in the Special Branch had made it essential for him to know everybody who was anybody. But his presence in the train was not connected with the leakery Billy was going up north to institute one or two inquiries that might ultimately lead to his discovering the place from which the Destroyer operated.

The Liverpool Express was thundering over the rails at a speeding of seven miles an hour when the Master struck again. And this time there was no respite.

The "X" flashed clearly above the screen of the view finder until it rested on the face of a first class compartment of the speaking express—Mortimer's compartment. Then the Master's hand stabbed down on the discharge lever.

And that compartment, that coach of that train that was traveling at over a mile a minute suddenly melted to nothingness—floor, partition, roof and steel framework vanished and only the living naked body of Mortimer was suspended in nothingness for

a fraction of a second. Then it was falling to the rails. Before it reached the rails it was struck by the remainder of the coach moving behind. Reduced to pulp and then broken and shivered to pieces by the shattering wheels.

As the two halves of the train came to a grinding standstill at the Warrington station were automatically applied, the young detective thought at first that somebody had pulled the communication cord. He leaned down to the permanent way about before the train had come to a standstill.

He hurried along to where the guard was already staring speechlessly at the dead car in use at the center section. The part of the coach was connected to the front end of the train that had come to a halt fifty yards ahead of the other part of the coach and the rest of the train. And the empty gap had been the compartment in which Mortimer had sat . . . evident that nothing could go wrong with his carefully planned getaway.

Castle examined the gap in silence, barely leaving the scattered contents of the train visible. One foot hammered on his knee—the Master had struck again, taken a slice out of a speaking express train. Why?

Only the Master knew why.

★ THE RADIUM "WAVE" THEORY

THE Liverpool Express arrived twenty minutes late. As Castle stepped up to the platform he perceived an evening newspaper from a speaking railway. The first page carried the full story of the train. The conclusion, not the significant words. "The cause of this singular disaster is wrapped in mystery. It is assumed that the reason to the Liverpool Express is an unaccounted with other strange accidents that have occurred during the past week, in regard to which both police and Government officials have been previously notified."

But neither the estate reporter nor Billy Castle could comment the big first page story with the insignificant paragraph on a back page headed "Who Stole the steam roller?"

The young detective walked to the station yard and took a taxi to the neighborhood of Liverpool University. It was as a grey stone house there that he talked to the man who might help him in his quest of the Destroyer. Professor Gregory Appleton's name was already known to the Prince, he was a specialist speaker of the time scientist who closed his door to the world and lived himself in his researches.

Castle rapidly outlined all he knew of the hidden terror that was striking at two continents. He told him of the disappearance of the Island Queen, the death of Rust, the silent pilot who fell from an empty sky the morning the Liverpool Express had vanished. He mentioned the significant fact that the victims were found without a flicker of clothing. And concluded with: "Now, Professor, I suggest that this man, whom we have said to be born, is using an apparatus that discharges some sort of ray. This ray is of sufficient power to disintegrate organic substances—wood, metal, clothing, etc., but apparently has no effect upon living substances."

The Professor nodded in deep interest. "Continue, my boy."

Billy Castle leaned forward. "Now, Professor—I want you to tell me whether such an apparatus is possible, whether in your opinion it would be possible for any man to build a machine that would discharge a

ray that would disintegrate dead material and leave the living unaffected, that would be so truly directional that it could take a slice out of a speaking express a hundred or a thousand miles away. Could it be done?"

Professor Appleton's lined face flushed into a glow of a smile. "Apparently it is being done." The smile vanished. "I can tell you for a number of years have been attempting to perfect an apparatus such as this which you suggest. Even during the war years there was almost newspaper talk of what was undoubtedly done in a 'dash' ray. Several men were working on similar apparatus at the moment. The theory is perfectly sound. I have an almost immeasurable collection. I say 'almost' because apparently at least one man of genius has abandoned."

"You believe that such a machine has been perfected?"

"For the moment I can think of nothing else that would account for the phenomena you describe. It is perhaps necessary to refer to the subject as a 'ray', if my theory is correct it is a wave. The famous Victorian physicist, Professor Vainstein, studied the scientific world in 1924 with a report on his research into the properties of the Gamma Ray emitted from radium. This ray was very able to the naked eye, but was fairly detectable on a photographic plate of a highly sensitive type. But, what was of outstanding interest, Vainstein discovered that the ray had almost identical qualities. Further, he said could do this—beyond the visible influence of the ray—was some unknown agent with striking qualities that would almost shake the world to its foundations."

"And he failed?" the detective queried. "Yes, he failed," the Professor answered slowly. "but seriously may be considered. . . and if he is to be the first in the past of his kind."

"Was he?"

"I mean that a very clever man once succeeded in projecting from radium some of the Vainstein's Unknown Wave. He is not disintegrating matter, but reducing it to its component elements. For instance, by directing the rays on a concrete building, the component elements of the concrete shatters at high speed and the concrete is reduced to dust. It appears to me that the ray affects only inorganic matter—which renders it possible to make for the moment the enemy of solid objects."

The Professor paused. "It would be a comparatively simple matter—having once discovered the source of the Vainstein's Unknown Wave—to direct an apparatus for projecting it—to give it a high degree of directionality. This is my theory. . . regard to the phenomena you describe. The Professor smiled again. "But I am reminded that it is only a theory. . ."

Professor Appleton might have been gratified to know just how accurate had been his description of the power that was the Destroyer.

Castle spoke eagerly. "Listen, Professor. Your theory sounds perfectly convincing, and I want to follow it up. There is a machine to carry positive—" "No," he said. "No." "Somebody is attempting death and destruction with this ray apparatus, you've got to produce some—something—that will nullify its effects. Take a steel helmet against bullets or coats against gas. Can you nullify a ray?"

The Professor looked keenly at Mr. "You are asking a lot, young man. You are asking me to produce a practical method of nullifying what is to me—a theoretical wave. It is possible that the apparatus, produce me with technical data . . . then, perhaps, I would have something to show to you."

"You mean you can't do it?"

"I mean that I will not say I can do it." The Professor rose on his last legs. "Leave me now, young man. I will think about it."

Convicts Break Loose

perhaps I will produce something with which you can at least experiment. It is a problem to which my mind responds. Come and see me in a few days."

And with that Castlehead had performed to be content. He caught the night train back to London, and arrived at his room in the hotel of dawn.

* THAT A MAN MIGHT GO FREE

BRIDGEMAN must go free! Bridgeman, highly respected stockbroker and man of business, must go free. They'd convicted him of misappropriation of his clients' funds—Bridgeman, who was so honest as the day. And the stockbroker, with that old-fashioned sense of loyalty that seemed almost out of place in the City, had gone down for eighteen

part of the neighbouring walls had crumbled, melted into this air.

A prison guard who, a moment before, stood unmoved with loaded cannon behind the grill of the gate felt the rifle mark in his hand staved down in another panic and found himself asked: For such was the manner of the Destroyer that it affected only immediate submission; his opponent neither remained unscathed. Then the guard . . . without sword or rifle . . . a gay in his front dentures where a gold tooth had been a second before.

And, inside . . . a thousand convicts stared at the wild man outside that had suddenly appeared as their gate. Stared, uncomprehending . . .

One of them shouted, a gestic "lifer" whose strident voice knew no mitigation. His head was incapable of following the outside that had come to him; his glaring bloodshot eyes were conscious only of one

They looked at each other curiously, as they lay flat on their backs with their lungs sucking at the air, or squatted on their haunches, or settled on a bench. For the first time some of them began to think and, as thinking, they knew that they were lost. Like crickets lured by the sunshine of a spring day to fly from the open cage . . . out into a desolate world of killers.

"We've got to wait!" one of them was shouting. "The cops will be coming and there'll be holy smoke. It's got to be every man for himself."

But even as the self-imposed leaders broke into furious argument—these individuals who saw the wisdom of disbanding, and those with the hard instincts who found courage only in the crowd—the Governor of Dartmoor was speaking urgently into the telephone, grim-faced warriors were wandering out of the breach, hazy-looks of armed police-



The taxi swung out to avoid a stationary steam-roller, and next moment the steam-roller melted into this air, vanished as though its great bulk had never existed.

months in the second division, whilst Hamilton, his partner, looked his single passage to Rio de Janeiro.

Bridgeman had been the poet in the game! Bridgeman was suffering in silence. He must go free . . .

The Master played with the thought as his back leaned over the files in his control room. With the Destroyer all things were possible, and Bridgeman did not choose to suffer. He crossed over and tested himself at the great central grill of the Destroyer, and concentrated in flick switches and turn dials with his delicate fingers. Until something vague and shadowy followed in the screen of the view-finder . . . a blurred mass of buildings that gradually clarified and were revealed in all their grim detail. Dartmoor Prison . . .

For a moment the white-haired, prematurely aged man stared into the panel . . . gazing with glazy eyes at the black mass in the neighbourhood of Prisoners, at the great grey walls, the huge iron gates of the main entrance. That centuries-old structure would surely, now could she, her Destroyer must go free.

A thousand convicts were wandering in the yards when the Master's hand stabbed down on the central switch of the Destroyer. For a split-second a flash took the air . . . then the main gates of Dartmoor Prison and

thing . . . the main gates had gone—the open moor was outside, unguarded.

He shouted again, waving one arm to the others. He commenced to run, others followed . . . until the threshold of them were passing in a mad, uncomprehending mob out of the prison yard. A rifle cracked somewhere behind, where the Destroyer had not been focused. The report was lost in the din of shouts and running feet . . . but the great in the lead abruptly pressed forward on his face and his eyes—before they closed—saw blazed uncomprehendingly.

Those behind halted and then the charging mob in the rear burst them forward. Here and there a man fell, rolled off by a warrior's bullet or swept underfoot by the charging crowd. Out through the breach where the main gates had stood the stream of the emergency was swirling above the thunder of their voices.

Swinging forward like a huge wave, with an edge of destruction . . . mad with the loss of liberty. Bridgeman was somewhere amongst them, as long as the polished stock-broker but an animal conscious only of the rolling waters, the open sky . . . and the striking wall that was receding behind his heavy boots.

Away out to the moors until the prison was a couple of miles behind them and then exhaustion brought them pausing to a halt.

men was wandering over the moors from half a dozen different directions. Cutlasses trembled behind barred doors; all pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the neighbourhood of the prison was being diverted. And already it was being whistled: "The convicts are loose . . . !"

The expectant face of the Master twitched suggestively with assurance as he gazed into the view-finder of the Destroyer. Why didn't Bridgeman get away? why didn't he leave that riddle, get away on his own? He turned a dial a fraction as he followed the movements of the crowd. Somewhere amongst them was Bridgeman . . . and Bridgeman must get away . . . now, before it was too late.

A few days of liberty . . . and Bridgeman wouldn't need to be going back to a cell. Just a few days—long enough to prove his innocence. Bridgeman had the proof. Bridgeman would talk—now.

A snapshot of R A F machines came up over the horizon, plunging out of the haze in the sudden disorder of their engines. One of the 'planes detached itself from the flight and spiraled down over the moorlands' back. Some of them raised their fins and swarmed veritablelike threads, and then a stick with a paper flag in it fell amongst them.

A startled prisoner snatched at it, hastily studied the paper and read the mes-

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